Becoming Witch: Creating and Confirming Witch Identities within Social Networking Spaces

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DECLARATION SHEET

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Abstract

"To think is always to follow the witch's flight" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 41)

"To be a witch is to live inside your own personal myth… even if you know you're creating it yourself" (Yates Garcia, 2019: 220)

The primary aim of this thesis is to understand how people use social networking spaces to create their witch identities. Using Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) Rhizome Theory and the notion of becomings it explores how self-identified witches share and use online posts to develop a sense of witch-self. This is explained through the innovation a theoretical framework that I name Rhizome-Mycelium Theory.

Witches do not have identical ideologies about Witchcraft, but they do have some similarities between practice that they share online within a social networking platform such as Facebook, Twitter or Pinterest. Witches share images, ritual, ideas and knowledge within an online community of practice hence they learn about Witchcraft from posts and group chats that are presented within the social networking spaces.

Responding to, liking and sharing posts creates a personalised online tapestry of self that blends discourses and presents a witch identity that is made up of a selection of ideas. The infrastructure of online platforms enables the collection of ideas and the creation of a self, which adheres to the idea of "polyphonic bricolage" (Schmidt, 2003: 10). A polyphonic identity therefore is the process where various ideas, experiences and discourses about witches are brought together to become a bricolage of a person and these are blended and amalgamated into a performance of a witch-self.

Navigating through the networks to collect ideas and share praxis, individuals access online spaces where they teach and mentor other witches. The interface of social platforms enables users to create their own micro blogs and video that attracts followers. The online community therefore sees the witch within the posts as an authority of Witchcraft. In turn, witches gain thousands of followers and become influencers and a celebrity. Celebrity-witches create their own personal rhizome of online networks and start to establish a branch of Witchcraft that is in addition to well-known and established forms of Paganism such as Wicca and Feminist Witchcraft.

This thesis argues that witch identities are in constant flux and are socially constructed through the exploration of online networks. It explains how the online platforms help to confirm what a witch is but also enables the self-creation of a variety of witch identities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my beautiful, kind and funny daughter, who is becoming a wonderfully empowered, creative and inspirational little witch!

Also, to my dad Mike, who started this journey with me but sadly, is now travelling in spirit - merry meet, merry part and merry meet again! x

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Simplified Glossary of Terms Related to Witchcraft[1]

It is vital to note here that I decided to change the common noun 'witch' to a proper noun. Therefore, at times throughout this thesis, 'Witch' has a capital letter. This is because I argue that it is possible to be a witch but there are many ways to becoming one. Hence it is important to make the distinction that when I discuss **a witch**, I am evaluating one type of identity, but when I use the term **Witch** the identity is less striated and demonstrates a multifaceted identity.

Altar	A place or table that becomes a focus for spell work. It may include objects such as candles, an athame, cup, wand, flowers, a pentangle, crystals and decorations such as flowers and ribbons
Athame	A knife used for ritual
Besom	A broom made of twigs and branches and tied with ribbon. Also used for rituals to cleanse a space of negative energy and offer protection. It is also used in handfastings where the couple jump over the broom when they are announced married
Blessed be	A greeting said or written at the end of a spell or passed between the community
Book of Shadows	A personalised family book that contains spells, advice and information about how to conduct magic. Also known as a Grimoire
Broom	An object that is used for clearing a space in preparation for Witchcraft and ritual. It can be bought but usually it is made by the witch
Candle Magic	This is the term used for meditative practices and spell casting. Some consider candle magic to be one of the oldest forms of magic. To conduct candle magic a person will choose a type of candle (pillar or votive) and a colour because colour is associated to specific

[1] For more detailed information on pagan practices and belief systems (both historic and contemporary) see the work of authors such as Marion Gibson, Ronald Hutton, Amanda Yates Garcia and Harmony Nice who are listed in the bibliography

	wants e.g. blue is associated with work. The intention is carved or written on the candle and then the person will conduct an incantation or chant and meditate on the flame
Cosmic Ordering	The process of a person meditating on something they want to happen or achieve and imagine it happening. The belief is that a person will order their want and the cosmos/universe will make it a reality
Druid	A person who follows a branch of Paganism
Druidism	A branch of Paganism
Esbat	A day that is usually linked to the full moon cycle. There are 13 in a year. Some Pagans say Esbats help prepare the witch for the Sabbat celebrations and festivals
Grimoire	A book that contains spells. It is created usually by the witch and includes personal incantations and rituals
Handfasting	A Pagan marriage ceremony. The ceremony uses a symbolic rope and loosely ties the hands of the couple together to show a mutual bond. They then jump over a Besom
Hecate	She is a Pagan goddess of darkness, Witchcraft and magic. She is related to Greek mythology
Lilith	Lilith is believed to be Adam's first wife before Eve in the Hebrew Bible. She became a demon. In Paganism, she is a powerful goddess who is linked to the crone. She represents feminism and empowerment
Mycelium	Botanical term for fungi. It is a colony of bacteria
Occult	A word used to describe events and experiences that are hidden, considered supernatural and cannot easily be explained
Pentangle	A five-pointed star that is usually used in ritual and represents the five elements (Earth, Air, Fire, Water and Spirit) or may represent the human body with head, arms and legs. Occasionally it is reversed and represents a horned god such as Pan or Cuernnos or for some it may represent the horns of Satan
Rhizome	Root system of a plant

Sabbat	The name given by Pagans to a day that is dedicated to ritual and Witchcraft. There are eight in a year
Sigil	A magical symbol that is created for various reasons such as protection, success, love
Skyclad	Being naked whilst (usually) conducting ritual in moonlight
S'mote it be	A statement of intent that is said at the end of a ritual or spell (so mote it be)
Smudging	The act of burning a herb bundle (usually made from white sage) and spreading the smoke around a space or around the body. The purpose is to purify the space with sacred smell and smoke
Tarot	A set of cards that include images and are used for divination
The Craft	The name witches give to the practice of Witchcraft
The Triple Goddess	The stages of the Goddess and Woman. The triple goddess recognises the Maiden who is without child, Mother who is with child and Crone who has had child or is unable to have child. It is also linked to the age stages of a woman's life
Wheel of the year	The seasonal cycle of Pagan festivals
Wicca	A branch of Paganism
Witch	A person who may take part in Witchcraft, spell casting and/or ritual (also see Witchcraft)
Witchcraft [2]	The practice of being a witch i.e. spell casting, divination, ritual, potion making. This practice of Witchcraft can have malevolent or benevolent intentions.

[2] There are negative views in non-Pagan society about Witchcraft and witches that often see Witchcraft as malevolent and witches as good or bad using the terms white or black witch. The witches I have met (online and offline) all use the term Witchcraft to explain what they do as a witch (their practice), hence that is the definition I shall be using throughout this thesis. However, for a more detailed historical account about the language associated with the two terms Witchcraft and Witch please see HUTTON, R. 2018. Meaning of the Word "Witch". *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft*. Spring 2018, 98-119.

Moot	The name given to a pagan meeting
Sex Magic	At times sexual intercourse is used as a spell. This ritual is called sex magic and includes the creation of energy and intention. The spell is released through orgasm

Chapter One: Introducing Witch



(*Thewitchoftheforest,* 2019. Accessed 17.07.19)

"I don't think they know what a witch is for them ... a girl calls herself an acrogenous alien! I see kids venerating that imaginary: Witch, the Occult community ... but that's not where the witch is. You're more likely to find a witch with a pair of walking boots and jeans looking upwards saying 'oh look there's a Scarlet Pimpernel!' So, I do worry for what the imagery of this dark - bizarrely the imagery Christians would like us to have. That's not the way that most of us are. We're quite normal mums and housewives, teachers, and doctors and lawyers and prison chaplains and engineers"

(Tanya[3])

1.1 Overview of the Thesis

Within this thesis I examine how self-identified witches explore Witch identities within social networking spaces, mainly through analysing what they post and how they interact with hashtags and embedded images. I argue that the collection of online experiences becomes a bricolage (Levi-Strauss, 1966) that creates a montage of the witch they feel they are and the witch they wish to be. Hence after reflecting on the experiences, identities change (Felicia, 2003) and a person writes their online Witch self into existence (Stern, 2003). More, the navigation through various social media platforms are related to individual choices and interests and the pathways are unique to each witch. They cannot be recreated and replicated. Thus, these pathways are the enablers to the becomings of a witch.

This study has discovered that a person uses social media to become a witch through:

- Following pathways of ideas[4] (through clicking on embedded hyperlinks and creating online searches) that are presented within social media posts. This

[3] Information about the Life History Narrative participants is in Appendix one

[4] Following pathways of ideas is the Theoretical Framework for the thesis. I name the framework Rhizome-Mycelium Theory. It is explained in detail within chapter

enables the creation of new knowledge and supports the spiritual pathway of the individual to establish the type of witch they wish to be.

- Performing and presenting online what they think a witch is. This happens through personal blogs, v-logs, video and images of ritual, practises and altars that are created and shared. It also happens through the specific infrastructure of the social networking platforms (for example YouTube, Instagram, Facebook) that enable the user to curate embedded media and collate a montage of their witch-self. This can also develop into a personal brand of a witch that is attractive to other interested parties.
- Playing with various Witch identities presented online via sharing, liking and creating or reposting images, text and articles.
- Reclaiming the concept of the hag or crone to challenge the stereotype threat and combat patriarchy and misogyny.
- Operant conditioning and phatic feedback where comments within posts reinforce a belief or practice.
- Engaging in online chat with individuals or offering online tutorials, mentoring and training about Witchcraft within the social media platforms.

1.2 My Positioning

I have always been interested in witches and Witchcraft since a child mainly because I was born around Hallowe'en and so my birthday parties and presents have frequently had a witch theme. I was brought up with the understanding that my

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two and is also represented in a visual diagram in Appendix three, chapter seven, images 4 and 5.

heritage is a blend of Welsh, Irish and gypsy-Romany. My mother often posited that my great-grandparents and ancestors were Tarot readers, mediums and gypsies, hence some of my family may have been 'cunning women' (although these are not the terms she used). Hence, I have believed in the existence of witches and the Occult from an early age and never found the concept of an old wart-ridden witch scary.

My interest in witches continued throughout my teenage years and twenties where I was fascinated in any representation of a witch within popular culture. I read *Spirit and Destiny* magazine (Buaer, 2020) in the 1990s, which was the first of its kind in Britain to openly discuss Witchcraft, and I watched reruns of television programmes such as *Bewitched* (1964 to 1972). I was attracted to the television episodes of *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996 to 2000) and *Charmed* (1998 to 2006) that represented a witch in a more normative way i.e. witches could be beautiful, young and married. At the time I was fascinated to see that the image of the witch was changing from the wart-ridden hag to the confident, attractive, empowered woman. Witch and her Witchcraft was becoming a normalised part of popular culture and I was beginning to realise that people were expressing their spirituality in ways other than Christianity. During this time, I started to practise candle magic[5] and read books about solitary Witchcraft and spell crafting. I found I was beginning to replace my old faith identity (that of a lapsed Roman Catholic) with a more pluralistic spiritual identity. I played with being culturally Christian and spiritually pluralistic. My sister however frequently called me a 'white witch' because of my use of Tarot, cosmic

[5] A ritual with candle: See glossary for explanation

ordering and candle magic for personal gain, yet at the time this was not a term I was comfortable with.

My interest in technology happened in 1996. I was one of the first teachers trained by British Tele-communications PLC in East London to use dial-up Internet with primary aged children. This was my first experience of social networking through video messaging and websites. I remember a conference call with some children in the North of England and was amazed with how we could live-stream and talk about ideas as if we were in the same room. In the 1990s the Internet and social networking was not common in primary schools.

In 2000 to 2001 I worked as a museum educator in the British Library and managed a funded project that digitised some of the collection so that it was accessible to schools. The digital images became a website called Words Alive! [6] and with the aid of a web designer, this additional section of the British Library's website became a platform for learning and sharing pedagogical ideas about how to use the Library's collection to develop the English National Curriculum and Literacy. We used techniques that were considered technologically innovative at the time. An area of the Words Alive! website became my Master's dissertation. I tried to encourage users to explore a specifically created virtual environment to gain understandings about sacred texts and analysed teachers' and pupils' perceptions of the space. My early adoption of technology helped me to become aware of the potential of online networking and how such networks could develop knowledge and learning.

[6] The project ended in 2001 and so the website is no longer available. However, it can be seen in a web archive (Words Alive! 2001). My Master's project was related to the theme Special Books that included images of sacred texts from the British Library archive.

Reflecting on my life narrative has helped me realise that the focus of witches and social media for my PhD study has been a natural progression towards my own Witch becomings. Through exploring postings, attending pagan moots and engaging in Life History Narrative with 13 witches, I have gained more confidence in identifying as a witch. I am very aware however that I am a researcher first and need to remain unbiased whilst conducting and analysing the research. It is essential therefore to acknowledge my position to ensure validity of my findings.

A neutral stance is impossible, when conducting empirical research because it will contain power relationships (Harvey, 2003) therefore a researcher must understand what may affect the validity of the findings. It is essential that before starting the research I acknowledged any potential bias that may arise because of my position as a researcher and witch and put ethical measures in place. Also, that I understood the possibility of unconscious bias in relation to the gender and ethnicities of witches (Thuraisingham, 2013; Chenail, 2011). For that reason, I have engaged with the ethical positions of Strong Objectivity (Harding, 1995)[7] and Guesthood (Harvey, 2003: 2004).[8]

As a researcher and a witch, having the stance of Strong Objectivity has meant that I have had a better understanding of the personal stories of my participants, because I am part of the community and have some insider knowledge, but I can also stand back and see how the narrative may answer some of the research questions.

[7] See chapter two for a discussion on research ethics and the idea of Strong Objectivity

[8] See chapter two for a discussion on research ethics and the idea of Guesthood

Furthermore Guesthood, has allowed me to perceive myself as a guest to their stories and be reflexive in the moment. As a guest to personal narratives and feelings, I acknowledge that although some of what is shared is not the same as my story or may be strange to me, it is still valid to the study and an accepted truth by the person sharing their stories. I am therefore less likely to write my version of a narrative or look for specific findings when I analyse the data. As a guest to the sharing of personal data I should treat the participant and their narrative with respect and appreciate the relationships that have been negotiated between researcher and participants (Harvey, 2003).

Life History Narrative Research is co-created hence being entirely neutral could be considered disingenuous to the people who are taking part in the research i.e. the research is done to them rather than with them. As part of the methodology of Life History Narrative Research the participant and researcher are equal partners in data collection and it is usual practice to share stories (Woolhouse, 2017; Etherington, 2007). Hence both the participants and I had conversations about personal praxis and belief, and I gained trust by sharing my story with them. Additionally, I have a social media presence and am part of online communities; consequently, some of my experiences and understandings of witches are shared with others whilst collecting images from the platforms. I have always ensured that my position as a researcher has been transparent when online.[9]

Accordingly, I am also aware that as a researcher and a witch, I have become part of a selection of personal rhizomes and may have influenced an individual's direction

[9] Ethics is expanded in more detail within chapter two

of thought by offering a hyperlink to a different site or liking or reposting an image from Pinterest, Instagram or Facebook. Likewise, the online media and narratives have influenced my own rhizome of becoming and much of what I have seen has either resonated with my belief systems or enabled me to learn more about different forms of the Craft. For example. Chaos Magic was something I did not know about until undertaking this PhD study. My online and offline interactions with witches have not made me become a witch. More, they have added to the natural progression of my personal spiritual journey.

1.3 What is a Witch Identity?

One identity that seems to be dominant in the West and in advertising during Hallowe'en is the evil, wart-ridden hag. Yet there is a recent witch identity within popular culture such as film and television of an empowered and beautiful female thus suggesting that the modern witch is not necessarily a bad one. Gibson (2018: 110) argues that negative beliefs about Witchcraft and witches, is a social construct hence a witch's identity will be formed not only from history but also from the values a society holds. A culture that shares understanding that occult forces (such as spirit entities) can affect one's fate, rather than happenstance, may use the devil worshipping witch identity as the reason for ill fortune for example. An evil witch therefore has been created because society likes to have binaries such as good versus evil; heaven versus hell; God versus Devil. Hence the image of the evil witch has developed into an accepted truth of what a witch is. Yet with various witch identities being represented in popular culture, this rhetoric is changing. Authors such as Hutton (2017), Gibson (2018) Lipscomb (2018) have recently explored the

history of a witch and in some cases analysed how the modern witch came into being. Like my own critique of witches, the examples and discussion are mainly centred on Western Europe, Britain and America but do acknowledge the broader geography of Witchcraft. It is easy to assume however that Western ideas of Witchcraft and witches is a world view and so it is important to acknowledge that in different cultures such as in Africa and some areas of Europe there remains potent views that connect the identity of a witch with ideas of evil, harm and devil worship (Gibson, 2018). Consequently, practising Witchcraft is still illegal in some non-Western countries and punishable by imprisonment or death (ibid).

My contemporary study of witches and Witchcraft for this PhD adds to Westernised, Eastern and Northern European Witchcraft studies such as that by Bailey and Michael (2015), Koning (2013) and Mitchell (2011) and will affect the future direction of Witchcraft research. It is however limited by using online examples of witches that are only from Britain and American. Nevertheless, I feel the narrow demographic does not limit the validity of the findings. The choice of using Western examples of witches and Witchcraft has been a purposeful decision because I wanted to marry the online data with the Life History Narratives. The recounts provided by the 13 Life History Narrative witches[10] relate to the individual's cultural upbringing hence it was an active choice to use online data from a similar cultural pool so that I could discover how witches used online materials to become Witch. The online data reflected

[10] Information about the Life History Narrative participants is in Appendix one

the ethnicities, Western values, gender, lifestyles and ages of the Life History Narrative demographic and enabled a rich dataset to draw from. Future research may explore different ethnicities and culture.

1.4 Research Questions and Aims

Whilst using Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter for personal reasons, I noticed that there were many people and online groups that explored some form of spirituality for example meditation, reiki[11] or spiritualism but it was also apparent that many people used the platforms to share knowledge about Paganism and Witchcraft. It was evident that they were using the platforms to share knowledge about The Craft[12] but the phenomena made me more curious because there seemed to be many posts that presented Witch identities and Witchcraft differently. I wanted to understand how people used the platforms to discover how to become a witch and wanted to explore their associations with various ideas, images and memes related to the concept of Witch. It was interesting to see that often the same images were shared, and many people claimed an authority that did not seem to be founded in a branch of paganism or a specific witch identity. I chose therefore to investigate how people developed their personal witch identities and decided upon three research aims:

1. To identify how people become Witch through the various online and offline connections that they have.

[11] Reiki is an eastern philosophy and alternative healing practice that is related to chakras and energy fields within the body. For more information see https://www.reikiassociation.net/what-is-reiki.php (accessed 26.08.19)

[12] The Craft is the term witches use for the practice of Witchcraft

2. To understand the extent to which social networking spaces encourage, reinforce and/or create Witch identities.

3. To understand how social networking spaces are used to create their personal realities of self.

The research questions evolved from the main aims and after conducting a pilot interview with two self-identified witches[13] (who were also sisters). The data developed into three themes:

Theme One: Authentic selves and the Occult

- What influences the formation of a witch identity?
- How do people construct and promote their witch identity?
- To what extent do social networking spaces encourage and enable the expression of a witch?

Theme Two: Non-normative ideas and presentations of a witch

- To what extent do people blend the use of social networking spaces with offline practices of Witchcraft?
- Is the occult related to becoming Witch and how is it presented online?
- How are witches validating their faith and traditions?
- To what extent is heritage important to a witch?

Theme Three: The interactions with popular culture and online

- To what extent are online interactions between self-identified witches rhizomatic in nature?
- Is there a common thread in the connections that are made between witches?

[13] The pilot was conducted with Grace and Kelly (digital interview 10.04.16) See Appendix one for participant information

- To what extent does popular culture affect the identity of a witch?

I used the research aims to structure my conclusions and the research themes to form the three data chapters, which are chapters four, five and six.

1.5 Structure of this Thesis

Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) concepts of becomings and rhizome theory provided a catalyst to my research. I outline how I have used and adapted their ideas within chapter two of this thesis. Within the structure of this thesis, I place the theoretical framework and methodology before my literature review because it is the foundation of this thesis and has impacted on the choice of literature I explored. Furthermore, in chapter two, I discuss digital ethics, confidentiality, my position as a researcher and I also explain the methods I used to gather data. The blended approach of collating offline and online data enabled me to gain a rich dataset that supported the three research aims.

Chapter three is my literature review. I explore literature based upon the themes that were raised within the Life History Narrative interviews. I explore mediatisation of religion and concepts related to digital religion through authors such as Campbell (2012; 2013; 2018) and Helland (2002; 2005) then relate the concepts to Paganism and witches with Cowan (2005) Ezzy (2003) and Berger and Ezzy (2009). Identity and constructs of identity is another theme. Exploring work by Gergen (1991); Schmidt (2003) Bunt (2002; 2009; 2018) and Fachin and Davel (2015) I discuss the ideas of authenticity, authority and playfulness and connect the discussion to other literature such as Filiciak (2003) to explore the portrayal of witch identities within

popular culture and social media. Next, I address Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becomings which is also in the work of Braidotti (2006; 2013) and evaluate the various research related to it. Finally, I address the concept of place and space, with authors such as Tuan (1977) and Massey (2005) and explore the idea of the sacred with Lynch and Sheldon (2013) and Turkle (2011) agreeing with Wagner (2012) and Campbell (2013; 2018) that social networking is a lived space.

Chapters four, five and six are three data analysis chapters that establish the core of this thesis. Chapter four explores the names people use or are given that identify the type of witch they are. The themes within this section address the concepts of authenticity, the goddess, maiden, mother, crone and the occult. Each theme forms a part of an individual's sense of Witch-self. Chapter five builds on this and addresses Witch identities related to heritage, self-empowerment, social epistemologies, authority and othering. The final of the three data chapters is chapter six and discusses how a witch will play with Witch identities and memes. A person will perform Witch identities through clothes, objects, rituals and text. Often a person will find a connection with a witch depicted in popular culture such as in cult films, *Netflix* or *Amazon* series. Often this connection is actualised through using quotes, memes and images from such media or through the reposting of Witch signifiers such as broom, cauldron and witch's hat.

In chapter seven I draw together the three themes and conclude that a person becomes Witch firstly by interacting with the online platforms, then uses the online interactions and networks to confirm what they already know to be a personal truth, which in turn helps them to understand what it is they want to know next. The

interactions lead them to further networking and self-study. Finally, through Rhizome-Mycelium connections, the person creates a bricolage from experiences that supports them in actualising their authentic Witch-self. This process is iterative, continuous and in flux hence a person's self-actualisation frequently changes so that they constantly become Witch. In chapter eight, I offer suggestions for future research and explore the importance of this study. I end the thesis with reflections on my personal becomings.

Chapter Two: Discovering Witch (Research Methodology and Methods)

> "Guesthood research… does not "walk in the shoes" of the "other"; it sits across a fire and engages in mutually enlightening conversation" Harvey (2004: 253)

This chapter explores the theoretical framework of this thesis and the methods that I used to gather the data[14]. During April 2016 to June 2017 I conducted Life History Narrative interviews with 13 self-identified witches[15] (2 men and 11 women). In addition, I engaged with online posts[16] and collected public postings and images from Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, and YouTube from April 2016 to March 2019. I acknowledge that there is a plethora of other social media platforms that I could have used but I specifically chose these five platforms because they were the most popular social media that the Life History Narrative witches used. Initially I had intended to analyse Second Life and include it with the five social media platforms, however, three of the Life History Narrative witches acknowledged that it was a virtual world that they were familiar with but did not actively use and 10 did not know of it. I decided therefore, that Second Life's relevance to my study was mainly limited to chapter four and not necessarily as relevant for other chapters.

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[14] Online data and interview data were collected between April 2016 and March 2019

[15] See Appendix one for participant information

[16] My engagement consisted of using search engines such as Bing (bing.com), Norton Safe, Search (search.norton.com); Yahoo (uk.yahoo.com) Google.co.uk and Google.com to find pagan groups, websites and individuals that had a public presence online. I created profiles that noted I was a researcher and in the main lurked within the social media platforms and observed people's posts. On occasion I commented on a post or/and engaged with some conversation. I also shared or liked a post or image. Often liking or following someone on Twitter or Facebook resulted in them following my profile and liking or sharing my content.

All Life History Narrative witches were given a pseudonym to protect their identity (See appendix one that details each person). They were offered the option to choose their own name. All 13 witches preferred to be given a pseudonym. The name I attach to each person therefore has been randomly chosen and is related to the initial letter of his or her name and the gender norm they felt comfortable with. None of the pseudonyms reflect the personality, age, ethnicity or occupation of the person therefore their birth name cannot be identified. The age demographic of the Life History Narrative witches is broad with five witches who at the time of interview were in their 20s, two in their 30s, two in their 40s, two in their 50s and two in their 60s. 12 witches were British born and one was born in America. All 13 witches lived in the United Kingdom. All Life History Narrative witches were white Caucasian. Nine were studying or had a degree. Two were retired and 11 were in part time or full-time employment. Four witches chose to disclose that they were married, two were with partners and six decided not to mention their current personal relationship status.

The online data that is published in this thesis are from public and some private accounts that reflect a similar demographic to the Life History Narrative witches. The data are accessible through the live URLs listed in Appendix Two. They can also be accessed through Appendix Three, which displays all 158 images in one file. Furthermore, each Jpeg and PNG are housed in electronic folders named e-folder chapter four, chapter five, chapter six and chapter seven. The images have been used (alongside the Life History Narrative interviews) to inform conclusions related to the three research aims and research questions.

Within this chapter I first discuss the theoretical framework of Rhizome Theory and my innovation of Rhizome-Mycelium Theory (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013). Next, I explore each method in turn. I have chosen to structure the chapter in this way because understanding how someone becomes Witch requires analysis of the complicated individualised social networking. I believe that if I explored the methods of data collection, before exploring the theoretical framework and methodology I would be placing the wrong emphasis on the methods because the theoretical framework drives and underpins this research.

The connections that create and confirm an individual's witch identity are complex. The pathways resemble a botanical root system or rhizome rather than a tree diagram or network. The methods I have used therefore have identified the connections that create networks, but it is the theoretical framework that has enabled me to understand the networks and relate them to Witch becomings.

2.1 My Theoretical Framework

In this section I discuss the theoretical structure for my thesis. I adapt Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome Theory (2013) and use it as a foundation to the analysis of the interactions and encounters of self-identified witches within the five social networking spaces identified above. It is important therefore that I explain Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome Theory and discuss literature that refers to the theory because only then can I establish how I have adapted it to create a new theoretical framework, which I name Rhizome-Mycelium Theory. In this thesis I demonstrate how Rhizome-Mycelium theory further supports the analysis of becoming Witch. My Rhizome-Mycelium Theory will add to the research fields of Witchcraft, religion,

identity and Social Media and offers another lens for analysing the constructs of identity.

Deleuze and Guattari (2013) use the term ‘rhizome’ and create ‘Rhizome Theory’ to describe a non-linear route to knowledge creation. For example, when people meet online or offline, opinions are shared, and so knowledge develops exponentially. The connecting of ideas enables the assimilation and adaption of concepts and creates new epistemologies. The connections eventually become tangled and resemble the root system of a plant such as a rhododendron bush or grass, so that it is difficult to identify where the original idea came from. The knots or appendages, which are formed from the ideas and online interconnections, make tracing back to the original source challenging. The interlinking connections and mass of complex networks is an example of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘rhizome’. The rhizomatic connections are complex and create a new set of independent links but are connected in some way to the original source (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 7). The intention of Rhizome Theory is for the researcher to explore how pathways come together to form something new rather than to explore the relationality between concepts. The rhizome is complicated and chaotic and always “in a state of flux” (ibid 2013: 26). This makes it a valuable framework for analysing identity formation because identity is created through interactions with others (Heckert, 2010) and becoming something is an on-going process; there is not an end. To become self is a journey whereas being self is a destination.

The links (also known by Deleuze and Guattari as ‘assemblages’) create a platform (‘Plateau’) where learning and knowledge can be formed. This happens through

presenting an idea within an online social media space. The idea becomes accommodated by other users and assimilated by those who encounter it. The idea is then adapted and transformed into new ideas that are also presented within the space. Deleuze and Guattari note the evolution of an idea within a connection as "de-territorialisation" (removing set boundaries or established ideas) and "re-territorialisation" (creating new boundaries and pathways to new ideas) and that this is the natural state of a rhizome. This process forms a new map that represents the thinking process of an individual.

Stone (2011: 655) discusses the various aspects of Rhizome Theory and explores the theoretical rather than botanical rhizome. She categorizes six principles of a rhizome namely:

1. Connection
2. Heterogeneity (composition of different parts)
3. Multiplicity
4. Rupture
5. Cartography
6. Decalcomania

Connection and Heterogeneity use naturalistic language such as river, flow, bulb, all of which have some relation to each other but are not dependent of each other. Stone uses an example of a river with many connecting parts that form one large part. She argues that tributaries, brooks and lakes mean that the river is never simply a river but is always in a state of becoming a river. Similar, to Stone's analogy, becoming Witch involves different ideas from various places that enable the formation of a witch identity. Becomings are like the complex rhizomatic connections of a river or root system of a plant. A person is never simply a witch because they are always in a state of becoming so the witch identity will continuously change.

Stone's third principle 'Multiplicity' of a rhizome notes the complicated nature of Rhizome Theory. An idea will form but will multiply and change due to the connections and encounters with other ideas. A thought is affected by multiple encounters resulting in a change to the original thought. The process is exponential. To keep improving and evolving however, the ideas need to be challenged, reflected upon and then adapted.

Such challenges relate to the fourth category of 'Rupture'. Similar, to the rhizome of a plant, which can break and reform again, Rhizome Theory suggests that new ideas will form from the old and create a new line of thought that is related in some way to the original idea. Moreover, comparable to the rhizome of a plant (where a break may restart in a new place within the root system so that it forms an offshoot that is interlinked) Rhizome Theory suggests new ideas can be formed and be linked to the original idea but develop independently away from it so to create a different or new network. It is the offshoots of the online networks that has been interesting for my study because they have ruptured ideas to create a new colony of thought. The ideas about witches relate to the original root system but do not link directly to it. This behaviour is mycelium, rather than grass because the new colony it is separate from the original root but is also symbiotic.

Finally, Stone's principle of Cartography refers to how a rhizome is a map of becoming. She suggests that unlike the art form of Decalcomania that reproduces or replicates a picture onto glass or marble (ibid: 11) a rhizome cannot be traced or copied. A rhizome is akin to the organic nature of fractals of ice, but it also maps the

splinters and divisions of that ice. It follows a chaotic and complex path so that it charts something unknown or unique. It is possible to follow the map, but it is so complicated it is impossible to replicate. It is an open map and so there are many entries and start points and cannot be re-created. I use this notion throughout my thesis and note that becoming Witch is a personal journey for each person. It cannot be duplicated and copied.

Lawley (2005: 42) suggests that the rhizome is not intended to be a metaphor for connections but more a "root-tree type of ordering mechanism" and suggests that using the rhizome as a metaphor reduces it to a diagram and closes "pathways towards other potential understandings" (ibid). Yet Deleuze suggests that Rhizome Theory is a toolbox for the invention of concepts (2013: xiii) and there will be tree like structures within it due to the connections, but overall the connections will be rhizomatic because there are multiple pathways and structures, and none follow a set direction that can be mapped but not recreated.

When applied to my research, the Rhizome Theory means that becoming Witch can be analysed through the life narratives of individuals, and online interactions. Each journey is individualistic hence cannot be recreated because of the chaotic and complex nature of impromptu encounters that may have an impact on self-concept and the choices of the individuals involved. Thus, the process of becoming Witch is personal. This thesis notes that self-identified witches explore their Witch identity through online encounters with images, postings, ideas and knowledge. As a result, a witch may adapt their self-concept and feel they are becoming their authentic self,

but their journey is not linear because it is self-directed and influenced by a variety of factors. This theme is explored throughout this thesis.

2.2 Models for Analysing Becomings

Although this thesis has used and adapted Rhizome Theory to analyse the becomings of witches, it is important to acknowledge similar theoretical frames that have been used to explore social networks and identity formation (for example Baker, 2013; Latour, 2011). The purpose is to justify how the original methodology of this thesis adds to interdisciplinary fields of social science, but mainly supplements the field of studies within Paganism, Witchcraft, social media and mediatisation of religion.

To start to understand the relation between connections, it is useful to consider Schleiermacher's metaphor of a tree with root, trunk and branches and which has been used in the past for interpreting philosophical, historical and practical theology (Furgusson and Furgusson, 2010).[17] Schleiermacher explored the sequential and inter-relational connections between philosophy, theology and history so that social science scholars could begin to understand how one is related to, and comes from another. Baker (2013: 213) uses Schleiermacher's language of Würzel (root), Korper (body) and Krone (head) to explain how relationships are formed. He suggests that the root, body and head (although distinct from each other) are interdependent. When connected they form a tree-like structure or an ordered hierarchy. Baker suggests that philosophy forms root, history (based in philosophy) forms the trunk and practical theology (which is based in history) forms the branches. Neither would be

[17] Schleiermacher's notion of philosophy being the root of religious thought, historical theology being the trunk and practical theology being the branches is explored in detail in his 1811 text *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*.

independent from the other and it may be possible to form a mimesis of the connections that is easy to interpret and recreate. Such tree-like structures can be reproduced: Because analysing networks through a set and organised structure suggests that there is a system of cause and effect. The tree structure demonstrates how the pathway can be traced and reproduced with the same effect time and again.

A tree-like structure however is rigid but tree-like theoretical frameworks, for example Actor Network Theory, can be effective tools that help to shed light on complex relationships such as the inter-connectivity of the Internet (Latour, 2011). Actor Network Theory (ANT) may be useful for understanding how one website or image stimulates or links to another and can be utilised to recognise networks between people, companies, situations and the Internet. It is represented through a tree diagram because the branches enable a clear tracing of the connections. Latour explained that a network is "not simply to designate things in the world that has the shape of a net…but to designate a mode of inquiry that learns to list…the unexpected" (2011: 799). ANT therefore tracks the connections made by an actor or 'agent' in whichever direction it takes so to understand the inter-relationality. Actor networking is conceptual rather than a physical notion, but the physical enables the conceptual. So, although 'Google' is a conceptual network because it is digital, it needs a physical server, computer and human for it to be able to connect and network. Hence ANT is useful to consider when analysing the infrastructure of a social networking space. However, Deleuze and Guattari do not believe a tree-like structure to be helpful when exploring becomings (2013: 15) because of the fixed procedural structure, hence they prefer the concept of a rhizome.

Latour (1999: 15) notes that Deleuze and Guattari suggested the term network to mean "a series of transformations, translations, transductions" but argues that network links to the Internet and means "transport without deformation" (ibid) suggesting that 'network' is not static and is a mode to pass on information and ideas. Latour continues to say that "double click information" (1999: 15) is not what he originally meant by 'network' and that criticality needs to be re-established with this term. Actor Network Theory, he speculates, is a method for exploring the social and suggests that it should be a way to explore the "structures of the social" (Latour 1999: 18) rather than the mechanisms. It is the in between networks (1999: 19) that may have more fascination and opportunity for open investigation. Therefore, Actor Network Theory is useful in exploring the social connections found on the Internet, yet more, is a way to identify the connections and understand why they happen and what they may mean. ANT is a useful theory to consider when analysing the structures of the social networking spaces and how they enable becomings, but it is not necessarily as useful as a sole method for analysing the way social networking spaces are used to confirm and create Witch becomings.

Deleuze and Guattari maintain that they are "tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees" (2013: 15) and have debunked the usefulness of the tree metaphor. They prefer comparisons to a root system because it is non-hierarchical, open to interpretation and not about affiliation but about alliance (2013: 26). They note that a tree structure to analysing connections is a tracing of the connections whereas a root structure is a map of the inter-relationality of the connections. Following the rhizomatic mapped connections of becoming Witch offers an opportunity to

understand how a connection influenced an identity rather than noting what has influenced it.

Nevertheless, Actor Network Theory does work well in tandem with Rhizome Theory because Latour, like Deleuze and Guattari, is suggesting researchers explore the middle of lines of flight i.e. the pathway of connections rather than the end result. So, instead of moving up the tree, Latour's ideas suggest that scholars should possibly move down, through and under the tree of connections: an interesting dichotomy that makes Actor Network Theory less tree-like and more rhizomatic than some social scientists may have considered it to be. Furthermore, both theories are possibly in tune with metaphors used within the witch community. For example, many witches share images of the Tree of Life that show interlinked branches and a trunk in the shape of a woman, which represents the goddess or the witch (chapter seven, image 2).

Arboreal structures may not be the best framework to use for this research thesis because, only using a linear tree-like model to analyse the organic nature of networking may limit the findings. Gerald Gardner, who is the founder of British Wicca, said, "The meaning of Witchcraft is... the deepness of the roots that has preserved the tree" (Gardner, 2000: 21) subsequently it might be useful to consider Being Witch as tree-like and Becoming Witch as root-like. Both are useful for analysing identity creation and confirmation of faith and belief within social networking spaces. However, Rhizome Theory is more in tune to the organic nature of identity construction hence it is the main theory that I utilise for this thesis.

Analysing rhizomatic journeys that help form identity can be problematic because of the lack of structure and chaotic nature of potential "lines of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 109) The problem occurs because it is not clear where the original path started and how or where it will end. The "lines of flight" have been altered and are knotted because of experiences and human interactions thus do not follow a predictable pattern. Yet that is why Rhizome Theory is interesting when considering the concept of becoming Witch. It is the becoming Witch that is explored not the being and so it is not necessary to find the end of the line that has a preconceived construct of what a witch is. I have encountered a person's line of becoming mid-journey, knowing that the self-identified witch has not yet got to the final confirmation of who they are. The witch is in the process of confirming and creating who and what they believe their witch identity to be. The rhizomatic experiences the witch engages in, form knots of knowledge and construct a tapestry of identity (Hevern, 2004).

Despite the problem of lack of structure, I believe Rhizome Theory to be a useful framework in enabling analysis of the becomings of witches. Many pagans tend to take a personalised approach to their faith development (McSherry, 2002; Cunningham, 2004; Cowan, 2005; Berger and Ezzy, 2007) hence it seems likely that no witch's identity or pathway into the faith will be the same. However, Lawley notes that there is a tension between the rhizome remaining "ontologically open" and still useful for applying and describing a theory (2005: 45). Suggesting therefore that the theory encourages thinking that is open to interpretation about how people become something. However, because the rhizome is in a "state of flux" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 26), if a researcher maps the pathway then the findings could be

questioned because the mapping never ends (Lawley, 2005). It is complex and exponential thus conclusions are difficult to make. Additionally, the findings are never the same due to the nature of the rhizome. This therefore raises questions about validity hence it is essential to acknowledge that the data is specific to part of the journey to becoming.

I recognise that the online data collected for this thesis is a snapshot of a moment in time rather than the map of a person's full becomings. Furthermore, the Life History Narratives established a personal journey from whenever the participant decided to start their story to the date of the interview. I acknowledge that the witch's journey has not ended, and the identity of the Life History Narrative witches is likely to have changed from data collection to the publication of this thesis. Nevertheless, the blend of narrative and online data does demonstrate the influences on the construction of a witch identity, and I have made generalisations from them. I am not stating that the becomings can or should be replicated. More, I argue that they provide clarity on how people use social media to help form becomings. The purpose of my study is not to know the full journey of a witch to replicate a witch. It is to discover what has influenced the journey so that I can critique how witches become Witch and discover trends. Such trends can then add to the interdisciplinary research fields. Therefore, the methods used for data collection within this thesis and the subsequent analysis of the empirical data are valid.

2.3 The use of Rhizome Theory in Other Fields of Research

To understand the usefulness of Rhizome Theory as a research tool, it is relevant to explore how the theory has been used in a variety of fields. I highlight educational

research, feminist research and social media research that have used Deleuzian discourse as a lens in which to explore and theorise what they have discovered from empirical data (see for example Mansy, 2013; Braidotti, 2006; Lawley, 2005). Such research demonstrates that Rhizome Theory is an adaptable framework. I end this section by looking at how rhizome is within paganisms before I discuss the specific methods I used to collect data for this thesis.

2.3.1 Rhizome in Educational Research

Stone (2011) discusses three ways of exploring limitation and boundaries and uses Deleuzian theory (that of the rhizome), to analyse its usefulness for educational research. She suggests that some educational research, which she names "Conventional Research" (2011: 648), uses clear boundaries to help structure and understand the research findings. However, other researchers may adapt and critique the set boundaries so that it becomes "Interesting Research' (ibid) but ultimately uses the boundaries as a guide and does not detract too far from convention. The "Extraordinary Research" (ibid) that she critiques is A Thousand Plateaus (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013), and she notes that research such as this occasionally challenges and changes the set boundaries of convention. This, she argues, is the type of research that should be conducted.

Stone discusses that rhizome has historically been a useful tool for education research and notes how Gough (2007); Honan (2004); Gregoriou (2004) has interpreted rhizomatic theory to analyse play, textual analysis, educational methodology and philosophy of education (Stone, 2011: 658). Such "Extraordinary Research" ensures that knowledge is democratic and not owned by the few but also

challenges conventions of what research should be. This is interesting for my thesis because the connections ensure a democracy to knowledge transfer and creation but even more, the concepts of Witch challenges convention.

Cartographies in Education (edited by Mansy, 2013) highlights the various ways Deleuzian theory can be adapted and applied to a wide selection of educational research. Chapters within the text explore politics, identity, cartographies, nomadic thought, identity and boundaries thus demonstrating the adaptability of Deleuze and Guattari's work. Lines (2013: 23-35) analyses music education and notes that the concept of the rhizome is a 'machine'[18] for thinking about creativity and change. He uses Deleuzian language and theory to challenge old notions of how to learn in music. He suggests that the rhizome offers an alternative view of music pedagogies and its value through creating a non-linear approach to learning music and appreciating that music can be created through a variety of forms. Therefore, removing elitist thinking about what constitutes 'good music'. These, Lines argues, are examples of rhizomatic pedagogies that make music education more contemporary and interesting. Taylor Webb (2013: 163-177) considers the rhizome as a way to map becomings and evaluate what it means to become a teacher. He notes that the goal of the chapter is to map 'teacher-becomings' through the four 'plateaus' of Multiplicity, Rhizome, Difference and Assemblage (2013: 164). He also

[18] Machine is a concept and term that Delueze and Guattari use in their text *A Thousand Plateaus*

uses Mansy's concept of Multiple Literacies Theory[19] (Mansy, 2013) to explore the self.

The research that is identified above highlights how useful Deleuze and Guattari's theories can be for blending established models together. Such research supports the further development of Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome Theory and encourages the blend of theory and the invention of new theoretical frameworks. Each study seems to have adapted and assimilated Deleuze and Guattari's work into an individualised methodology, which seems also to be favourable to the ethos and intention of the original theory (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 3,4,5). With respects to my research thesis, blending and adapting Rhizome Theory is an accepted practice hence my innovation of Rhizome-Mycelium Theory will add to interdisciplinary research methodologies.

2.3.2 Rhizome in Feminist Research

Gedalof's paper (2000) takes an interesting view of Braidotti's, Harraway's and Deleuze and Guattari's work in relation to the concepts of nomad, cyborg and identity. She considers the narratives that suggest a woman's identity as being equated to the identity of place/home (i.e. a woman's activities are linked with creating a home and has distinct boundaries) but suggests that seeing Woman as having a "home" identity, is "tree-logic" (2000: 341) which can limit the potential of what Woman can become. It is a fixed way of thinking and therefore "molar" (concrete; firm in position) and sedentary (2000: 314). Having a perception of

[19] *Multiple Literacies Theory* explores the idea of how people use many different literacies and language to describe who they are at a given time or within a situation. Each literacy tells a story of who they believe themselves to be (Mansy, 2012)

Woman as mother, daughter, homemaker, cook, princess, pretty, delicate is not allowing the woman the opportunity to be anything other than these striated concepts.

She argues that the concept of Woman should be considered a 'nomad' i.e. a person who is not of a fixed abode and exploring identity of Woman through the connections she makes. Nomadic Woman is beneficial to conceptual understandings of feminism because it resists the narratives related to the concept of "imagined communities"[20] and Woman (2000: 342). Conceptualising Woman as ever evolving and in the middle of 'place' means Woman is redefining and restructuring her relationship with identity. Gedalof suggests that we should consider identities related to space and place as a process of thought that is problematised and then reconstructed into new concepts (rhizomatic). She argues that if we consider experience and understanding of place and space to be nomadic (2000: 345) rather than fixed, then the process of becoming place and becoming space provides multiplicity to the process of becoming Woman. Gedalof explores how women create their own identities and push back against heuristic discourses about Woman through the networks women have for example, the Red Tent movement (Olorenshaw, 2016).[21] Hence Gedalof's use of Rhizome Theory is pertinent to my

[20] For example, one imagined community is the identity of a woman who is within the home community and nest making, another is to nurture children in the work-place and another is passive and pretty in society. This also links to the 19th century values of The Cult of Domesticity and Cult of True Womanhood

[21] Red Tent is a feminist movement that has recently grown in popularity, yet it is acknowledged that the concept of woman-only groups has been actualised in communities for centuries. Women of all ages meet to discuss issues that affect them such as childbirth, sexual health, patriarchy and help each other through a community of support and acceptance. The red tent community is considered a place

thesis because for some, to become Witch is an active fight-back to preconceived notions of what a witch is.

Al-Zobaidi (2009) relates his research directly to Deleuzian theory. He has a different use for the term nomad from Braidotti and Gedaolf, and like O'Brien (2012) sees it as a movement within spaces, however in contrast to O'Brien he defines digital nomads as a purely online practice rather than an offline and online one. His article explores how Palestinians who have lost their physical place due to conflict, have re-established a space online hence he names them 'digital nomads'. He suggests that Palestinians are digitally nomadic and use the Internet to explore their identity yet frequently move from one site to another when one is shut down. He suggests that this enables people to create their own space for becoming because "it allows dispossessed people the possibility for such living" (2009: 305).

Using Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "nomadology" (2013: 306) Al-Zobaidi argues that the social environments on the Internet are a type of "special existence where one does not possess or does not need to possess land" (2009: 305). He evaluates how use of the Internet through photo sharing and posting messages on a specific website[22] enabled people (who have had much of their home-land taken from them), to have a space to remember people and events and re-establish a social space to explore Palestinian identity. The identity of place has now changed, as has

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where women feel they can have a safe space to understand what it means to be a woman.

[22] https://www.palestineremembered.com/ is the website that Al-Zobaidi refers to in his article (accessed 26.08.19)

the identity of home. This is because of rhizomatic connections. The people are using the Internet to confirm and create identities that become Palestine or become Home.

Al-Zobaidi's article highlights how Rhizome Theory can be adapted and used in a variety of ways within interdisciplinary research. His ideas are useful for my thesis because exploring social networking places as nomadic plateaus that enable individuals to become something, is worth considering for becoming Witch.

2.3.3 Rhizome Theory in Social Media

Lim (2014) explores the rhizomatic behaviours of video blogging (v-logging) yet does not explore this in detail. Although he nods to the sharing and re-creation of videos from playlists and within new blogs, as rhizomes (2014: 525), the paper seems to lack criticality of why they are rhizomes and why the multiplicities of video that are reproduced (2014: 529) are demonstrations of rhizomatic behaviours that aid understanding of the various ontologies within video social media.

In addition, Benkirane (2012) notes how Facebook and Twitter were effective modes for networking political ideologies during the Arab Spring. She uses the term "cognitive nomad" (2012: 2) to identify how activists used the social media to marshal connections and move from being to becoming, which she claims is a postmodern ontology (ibid). Although Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome Theory was acknowledged, the theoretical framework was used as a metaphor that recognised the ontology rather than explained it. Both Lim and Benkiranes' articles use Deleuze and Guattari's language of plateau, rhizome and multiplicities but seem not to explain how the use of the Internet was rhizomatic.

Buchanan (2007) argues that although there are good considerations for Rhizome Theory with the Internet, the Internet is not necessarily a rhizome. This is because it does not meet all Deleuze and Guattari's (2013: 21,22) criteria of a rhizome (Buchanan, 2007: 9). He measures various websites against six principles (listed below) and finds them wanting because it is difficult to measure intent of a user (ibid) hence difficult to know if a person is replicating, reproducing or recreating ideas.

1. Rhizome connects any point to another point
2. Rhizome cannot be reduced to a singular item. A rhizome is composed of many parts that are related to each other and consequently, no point in the rhizome can be altered without altering the whole. Each part is related to another.
3. Rhizome operates by variation, expansion and off shoots, not reproduction
4. Rhizome has an infinitely modifiable map with multiple entrances and exits
5. Rhizome does not have a head or starting point
6. Is not amenable to any structural or generative model

(Six principles of a rhizome. Adapted from Buchanan, 2007: 9-10)

Furthermore, Buchanan argues that the Internet is not necessarily evidence of multiplicity because if one was subtracted it would not affect the other (2007: 10).

Buchanan notes that the user is making an individualised choice, yet it is the search engines such as Google, eBay, Pinterest and Amazon that direct user's request to a particular site. The choice is dependent therefore on options created by algorithms from research history and location in the world. Thereby it is the search engines that make the user feel as if they are "becoming-world" (Buchanan, 2007: 15). The Internet therefore is not about creating connections, but about searching them out

(Battelle, 2005). For this reason, I focus Rhizome Theory and Rhizome-Mycelium Theory on exploring the pathways and choices a witch makes that enable Witch becomings rather than on the analysis of the Internet or social media platforms.

Social media such as Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Facebook and Twitter encourage independent responses from networked people. They encourage a liquid-modern (Baumann, 2007) approach to internet use i.e. a fluid approach that follows no precise path. Therefore, it may be pertinent in future to use the six principles identified by Buchanan as a measure against whether sites such as Twitter or Facebook are rhizomes. This thesis however is not analysing to what extent a social media platform is a rhizome. It explores how the connections within such sites support becomings of witches. Hence, it is not important whether a social networking space is a rhizome. The import lies in whether it is likely to be a platform or plateau (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013) that enables rhizomes to happen. Hence is the second research aim (see chapter one).

Van Djck (2012) uses Actor Network Theory to explore the social media platform Facebook. He suggests that the digital architecture encourages networking between strangers, however there is still the opportunity to deviate from the policy and systems of the site to use it in any way they choose and create an identity that may not be their own. He notes that authors such as Jenkins and Deleuze say that "grassroots movements" use the technology to express creativity and so technology encourages users to be active (2012: 7). Being a platform that enables connections and one that is a transmitter for connections (2012: 10) could be evidence towards

Facebook enabling rhizomatic behaviour and meeting some of Buchanan's principles.

Merchant (2012) also explores Facebook and other textual based social media, but also like Wellman's considerations (2002), feels it is an extension of pre-existing friendships and people perform to others what they wish them to believe. It can be seen in the paper that Merchant believes social interaction on social media to be connecting people through "a sense of fluidity" (2012: 9) and that it is multiplicitous hence offers some evidence towards how researchers use Rhizomatic Theory.

Twitter seems to replicate a rhizome because, according to Segerberg and Bennett (2011), the hashtag and re-tweets encourage networking to "disperse widely in unpremeditated combinations across a variety of feeds and networks" (2011: 203). The data presented in their paper seems to identify no hierarchy. Although the article explores the organisation of collective action, it demonstrates the potential social media has for connecting points and the expansion of ideas within a structure that is nebulous. It seems to meet many of Buchanan's six principles for a rhizome, but the paper does not address whether a hashtag or re-tweet affected the platform of Twitter or the users.

Virtual World media such as Second Life meets many of Buchanan's six principles of a rhizome because its purpose is to connect people through discussion tools and through the various 'islands' contained within. There is a fluid structure that is exponential, encouraging expansion in various directions depending on the creativity and imagination of the 'resident'. Boellstorff's (2008) seminal book about his anthropological work on the development of Second Life contains many examples of

the social media meeting the principles of a rhizome. The only principle that is not necessarily explored is whether altering one part of Second Life would affect another.

However, on further analysis, Buchannan's second principle where one part of a rhizome affects another can be questioned. Deleuze and Guattari do not explicitly note that one part of a rhizome is dependent on and alters the nature of the original source. This is because the rhizome is a journey not an end. It seems that Deleuze and Guattari are stating that a rhizome changes its nature as it evolves, "when a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 22). Thus, Rhizome Theory is best used to analyse nomadic becomings rather than striated structures i.e. the networked construction of social media.

The Rhizome Theory framework within my thesis aids understanding of how the social media plateau is used for the confirmation and creation of identities. Also, how the assemblages between witches confirm the concept of Witch and Witchcraft. Through such interactions, the witch develops a sense of self and in some cases, becomes Rhizome. Therefore, I have created a new theory called Rhizome-Mycelium theory that has evolved from Deleuze and Guattari, and which is discussed in the next section of this chapter

2.4 Rhizome-Mycelium Theory

Although this thesis uses the theoretical framework of Rhizome Theory to analyse the ways witches have used online and offline connections to form their personal

Witch identities, I feel it is important to include my own theory to further analyse some of the becomings that have been observed in the dataset. At times a witch creates an independent website, Instagram page or YouTube platform that contains stories, teachings and ideas about their own personalised interpretation of what it means to be a witch. They gain many followers and the community consider them to be an authority on Witchcraft.[23] These witches offer an offshoot of established pagan philosophies and ideologies.

Observing how witches gained online popularity and were recognised as an authority on witches and Witchcraft made me acknowledge that some people were creating a rhizome. People became an authority independent from the tree of Paganism. I recognised that the rhizomatic behaviour however, was something more akin to mycelium with a root system that had many connections but was independent from the main plant. Hence, I felt I needed an extra theory to explain this phenomenon. Therefore, I have created Rhizome-Mycelium Theory and I blend my understanding of rhizomatic behaviours with that of fungi.

Mushrooms spread the colony under the ground through rhizomes and so each mushroom is connected in some way to another. They also spread over ground through spores so that new species of mushrooms can develop or establish new colonies. Consequently, a rhizome creates new roots systems whereas mycelium, offer new plants. Both root below the surface and fungi above it, add nutrients to the

[23] I name witches who claim to be an authority on Witchcraft and who then gain popularity and online status, a Celebrity witch and/or Rhizome witch. The evidence and discussion about this identity are within chapters five, six and seven.

original source plant. The tap root and mushroom colony have a symbiotic relationship.

Using the metaphor of a rhizome and mycelium I noticed that some individuals seemed to behave in ways that were similar to a mushroom[24] and spread their own ideas resulting in a new notion of Witch within the online community. Consequently, the social networking space potentially offers a witch a set of new independent connections creating a new Witch movement. This movement has a root system that is the online witch and independent rhizome structure of networks. They do not rely on traditional pagan teachings of Wicca or Druidism or Spiritual Witchcraft but do help them to continue to exist.

Exploring the data for my research in this way has provided me with an opportunity to see how Witch identities, knowledge about the Craft and pagan practices are formed, confirmed and transformed. Analysing the data with regards to the behaviours of mycelium and rhizome has provided a rich tapestry of information that has helped me to understand the multi-layered approach people take to faith identities. Deleuze and Guattari created Rhizome Theory so that it could be altered and developed by the reader. They suggest that their seminal text was the taproot or "tap-book" of the rhizome (2013: 3,4,5) and the intention was for the assemblages of ideas to be developed further. I feel therefore that it is fitting for me to further develop Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical framework with Rhizome-Mycelium

[24] Puffball mushrooms for example can create new colonies through spreading spores above ground when they divide thus setting up a new root system. The root system of the new mushroom and colony may attach to the original fungi and plant but more often creates a new set of roots.

Theory. As far as I am aware, this theory has not been explored previously in the field of religion, religious studies, paganism or social media.

My research thesis observes that identity creation and confirmation has not been due to one influence; it has been a blend of online and offline experiences that have formed new ideas about personal identity (rhizome) or new identities and faith practices (mycelium). The findings to this will be further explored in chapters four, five, six and seven.

2.4.1 Paganisms as Rhizomes

It is an understanding within the pagan faith that the traditions, rituals and practices of Paganism have been handed down and taught over the centuries by a trained High Priestess and by the females within a family (Murray, 2009; Alder, 1986; Crowley, 1996). Within the Wiccan tradition, an individual would gradually gain an understanding of the lore and traditions associated with Witchcraft (Gardner, 2000; Crowley, 1996; Cole, 2018) and collate their knowledge in a 'book of shadows' or 'Grimoire', which would contain collections of spells, advice and rituals that they have learned. The authority of pagan dogma therefore is believed by Wiccans to lie with the one to one training and the collection of spells, which would be considered sacred and not for sharing outside of the family (Gardner, 2008).

Hutton (1999) however notes that there is little evidence of the female lineage having authority before Gerald Gardner and if Grimoires were centuries old sacred texts that contained dogma, then few if any exist today. Suggesting therefore that, unlike the Abrahamic religions for example, pagan heritage is difficult to trace and authenticate

and so could be considered a new religious movement rather than an ancient religion, as some Wiccans believe (Pike, 2001; Cunningham, 2005; Telesco, 2005). Hutton argues that pagan traditions, such as Wicca, are recent and postmodern, whereas nature practices, such as Druidism and Heathenism, have a more authentic heritage related to early Britain but are not necessarily a religion (2017).

For solitary pagans however, it seems that keeping faithful to a heritage that may or may not be 'true' is not as important as creating a truth of their own (Lister, 2017). The connections and learning that happens with solitary pagans who may identify with terms such as Druid, Heathen, Witch, Wiccan, seems to have an eclectic quality or a 'pick n mix' approach to pagan epistemology and ontology (McSherry, 2002). Ezzy (2006) argues that there is a consumerist approach to religious affiliations in postmodern times. Thus, it may seem logical for individuals who are seeking some spiritual solace to create a hybrid pagan identity. Indeed, in my study respondents have used the terms Druid witch, Buddhist witch and Dianic witch to identify their spiritual identities as is explained in detail within chapter four of this thesis. It seems useful for my thesis therefore to use Rhizome-Mycelium theory to help analyse how a person who identifies with the Craft connects with others online and how that interaction supports their pagan faith identity.

Cowan suggests that it is the "consumerist" (2005: 158) interaction with websites and social media platforms, such as chat rooms, where a person develops their spiritual/religious identity. This happens through them identifying with like-minded individuals and groups so that responses and questions by 'newbies' are affirmed and reaffirmed but it is the "correlation between identity, disclosure and investment"

(2005: 155) that makes a person become Wiccan, Witch or pagan. Meaning, a person will identify with a religious or spiritual community through initially sharing their ideas in a private online forum and reflecting on what all the practices and knowledge means to them personally. They will then express their identity externally in an open offline forum, such as a moot. This, notes Cowan, is a gradual process and people move through states of being so to become pagan.

Furthermore, he stresses there is a sense that being identified as pagan online is less of a risk than identifying as one offline because of the significant investment that is required (Cowan, 2005: 159). He suggests that it takes more courage and commitment to affiliate to a particular faith and take part in collective practice offline than it does online. This is because of the physical nature of meeting and engaging with people and the physical personal connections that are created as a result. It is the development of strong ties, he suggests, rather than weak ones that make it a successful conversion.

McSherry explored cyber-covens and proposes that, "the logic of technology has become invisible – literally occult" (2002: 6) hence it can be "reshaped" to meet a person's imaginative creativity. She suggests that cyberspace is a natural forum to practice Paganism and like Cowan (2005) acknowledges that becoming pagan is a gradual process that requires investment. As an active pagan and member of the online coven originally named ShadowMoon but later JaguarMoon, she provides practical advice on how to use the Internet to develop online pagan practice. The problem with books and online sites such as these however is that it is difficult to validate authority (Cowan, 2005: 198) and may make the user collect knowledge that

is incorrect, misguided or even harmful. Cowan suggests that the internet encourages a "Gnostic authorization of modern paganism" (2005: 202) and as such power by someone who has charismatic authority can be misused as has been noticed in the past with some new religious movements (Puttick, in Dawson, 2003: 233, 236).

Although this is a useful consideration, other studies suggest that pagans gather knowledge from a range of places hence their epistemology is likely to be an amalgam rather than from one pure source (Coco, 2008; Berger and Ezzy, 2007) and as such may be less dangerous than Cowan claims. The argument assumes pagans do not have authority over what they believe to be true or not. However, Hope and Jones suggest that pagans do have agency and are moving more towards Wallis's notion of "epistemological individualism" (Hope and Jones, 2006: 344) and conducting "reflexive individualism" (ibid). pagans are relying on personal experience to make judgements about spirituality and this is giving authenticity to alternative pathways (Telesco, 2005).

Moreover, the argument of authority and authenticity could be claimed about any religion in the 21st Century. Although Christianity for example has a main source that has a claim to religious authority, its interpretations are varied depending on external factors. For example, whether the extra reading and learning material from the Internet that the initiate used was vetted; the version and translation of the Bible that they read; the denomination that their interpretation leant towards and where their religious teacher learned their theology. Such factors are likely to influence the faith identity of the individual. It is impossible to monitor personal interpretations of text even when the text is written verbatim from its original source, (such as the Qur'an)

especially when it is online (Wagner, 2012) but influences also come from various offline relationships.

There are many truths and many versions of reality (Crampton and Elden, 2007) hence any religious authority can be questioned because it is related to power. Yet Paganism is attractive to many because of the lack of hierarchy and seemingly non-stratified aspects of power and authority. An individual who is a solitary witch will feel that they have the same power to affect change, create spells and undertake ritual as a High Priestess in a coven. The interpretation of gathered knowledge is individualised by the witch and it is an expectation within the Craft to make any formalised ritual or spell personal to the them (Lister, 2017). Suggesting therefore, a more liquid modern approach (Bauman, 2007) to religious authority rather than a postmodern one. So, dogma in Paganism is not as important to a 21st century solitary pagan as it is to a 21st century Christian for example.

Rhizome-Mycelium Theory has been created to develop an understanding of how a witch creates a faith identity and a sense of belonging when there is no obvious route to initiation or a recognised place of worship. It has enabled me to explore questions such as what has influenced a witch's faith identity? How does a witch create a faith identity? and why does a witch identify with ideologies?

Furthermore, my study analyses the visual and textual discourses of witches that are presented online, with the aim to understand the extent to which social networking spaces facilitate the process of becoming. Hence methods such as Life History Narratives have helped me map the journey into self-actualisation and spiritual

development of 13 individuals, who identify with the term witch and concept of Witchcraft. However, as noted previously, I am mindful that the data gathered is a snapshot of a point in time. Perceptions may be different in years to come because the "fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction and" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 26) hence an individual will always be becoming something and will always be in a transitional state. Therefore, I can only explore how they have formed their Witch identity thus far, and how they are developing it further into personal becomings. Like a true rhizome, this research looks at the middle stage of an individual's becoming Witch.

The next section of this chapter explores the methods I used to gather the data and ends with a discussion on ethics and a summary of the chapter.

2.5 Methods

My research draws on Life History Narrative methods, online ethnographic approaches to exploring social practices, and the written conversations and visual discourses of witches. To offer an overview of why I have chosen them, it is worth presenting a brief discussion about wider approaches and how they relate to my research. I chose more than one method because it allows a richer exploration of the data.

2.5.1 Life History Narrative Methods

Conducting Life History Narrative interviews to explore personal experience and identity construction, entwines theory and method because it encourages researchers

to review in real time, the temporal and social context of the events being described. As the interviewee narrates their personal story to the researcher, they review and reflect on past events and life choices. Life History research supports reflexivity so that the interviewee reviews what has influenced certain life choices and fundamental opinions about the theme that is being discussed with the researcher. The approach encourages the interviewee to justify and explain life choices, experiences and events (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 25; Burns and Bell, 2011: 4) and the stories can simultaneously be considered real and constructed. Campbell and McNamara note that stories are "reconstructed in the sense that there are real people with lived experiences and identities that replicate and authenticate the narrative accounts of the characters who inhabit the apocryphal tales" (2007: 100).

My research explores how witches have constructed their faith identity and so Life History Narrative is a useful method for exploring the influences that may have inspired a person towards a performance of Witch and their journey into becoming Witch. Life History Narrative research provides a means of challenging the dominant narratives and the tacit givens. It investigates the small events, the emergent themes, the contradictory stories and the accidental happenstance of lives (Denzin, 2008). Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for individuals to stop and reassess who they are and who they have become. As Lieblich (1998: 7) suggests, "We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell". Thus, Life History research, seeks to understand the complexity of identity formation, and re-formation, at differing stages in life.

As noted previously in this chapter and in the introduction to the thesis I interviewed 13 self-identified witches (two males and 11 female). The interviews took place at a specific time in the interviewee's stage of becoming Witch at a place and time of their choosing. Eight Life History Narrative witches had been a practicing Witchcraft for over ten years and were very experienced in their practice. They had explored a selection of pagan identities[25] whereas Kelly and Holly were relatively early in their pagan practices.

It is likely however that the witches in this study may have reformed or developed their Witch identity in some way by the time this thesis is completed. Indeed, five months on from the Life History Narrative interview, Sienna tells me she is much more comfortable with using the term Witch to identify her spirituality but at interview was more reticent in doing so. She felt at the time of interview that it was a loaded term with negative connotations. She seemed nervous of other people's opinions of her witch identity. Nevertheless, the data from the Life History Narrative interviews is still valid for aiding understanding about how a person becomes Witch.

Analysing the interviews for patterns into what may influence someone into becoming Witch, and how people personalise their faith identity, has helped me to understand how identity formation is an iterative and evolving process. Therefore, it was not my intention to "promote coherence, singularity, and closure" (Stronach & Maclure, 1997: 104) with the Life History Narrative data, moreover it was my intention for the interview to be a 'plateau' to explore the linkages that have made a person who they are at that moment in time.

[25] The most experienced witches were Mike, Tanya, David, Penny, Jenny and Felicity. See Appendix one for more details about the participants.

Life History Narratives are co-constructed. The researcher and interviewee jointly construct the stories that are being told. This is a useful method for exploring meanings behind terminology, clarifying intentions behind decisions and evaluating behaviours. Whilst conducting the interviews I have however been mindful of Geiger's warning of how such interviews have the danger of being led by the researcher because of the potential for leading questions (Geiger, 2004: 401). For example, I may have a pre-conceived view of how a person develops a witch identity and may lead the interviewee's story towards it. Hence, I had intended to include a multisensory approach to my Life History Narrative interviews as is advocated by Pink (2011) and take, as far as possible, a collaborative and non-exploitative approach (Cresswell, 1998: 83).

The multisensory approach involved the interviewees drawing a life history line and marking the events they saw important upon it. It would act as a memory aid because it included drawing, talking and listening. Graphically mapping narratives provides a chronology for the stories the interviewee chooses to tell, facilitates recollection and encourages active engagement within the interview (Woolhouse and Cochrane, 2010; Woolhouse, 2017). However, only two out of the 13 interviewees decided to complete a life history line and so this method was not utilised to its full potential and has not become part of the dataset.

All interviewees were given the option to use pen and paper, but 11 chose not to. This could have been because of several factors, but one interview was conducted in an open field, one in a cafe and two in a public house. It is possible the participant did not feel it was conducive to the environment. Indeed, Felicity did note that she -

preferred not to because she was outdoors. It could also have been because the paper was too large, too small or on occasion rolled up and would not flatten out hence putting the interviewee into a problem-solving mindset rather than a story telling one. It is important that the physical space for an interview needs to encourage a relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere and an interviewee needs to feel that there is an element of trust because they are sharing personal ideologies, belief systems and history. I feel that this is even more important for the interviewee who self identifies as a witch because historically witches are reticent to reveal their Witch identities. Therefore, it is important for the interviewee to choose where and when to meet with the researcher. Participants were given the option to meet in a public space, their home or my home. Appendix one gives details of the location and the length of time of the interviews.

To ensure a non-exploitative approach (Creswell, 1998) I refrained, as much as possible, from interrupting and asking questions during the story telling, and brought in further questions and clarifications once the narrative had elapsed or slowed down. If the interviewee had not mentioned social media or the Internet, I asked a specific question about their use of social networking spaces such as chat rooms and social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. I found that this led to a new direction within their narrative. Such a question helped co-construct the narrative, but I did not lead the interviewee. Life History Narrative research can explore how "individuals negotiate their identities and, consequently, experience, create and make sense of the rules and roles of the social worlds in which they live" (Sikes and Goodson, 2001: 2). My role therefore was to illicit how the interviewees negotiated their spiritualities within an offline and online social environment.

2.5.2 Ethnographic Methods

In the 21st century, people's daily practices involve regularly using social media to share ideas, connect with like-minded individuals and to keep up to date about areas of interest (Campbell, 2012). Consequently, the electronic environment becomes a reflection of the individual. Because of such, I felt that exploring social networking spaces as personal reflections of oneself was an interesting area for study, mainly because there are not many recognised offline places where witches can meet and transfer knowledge. Conducting online research enabled me therefore to gain access to communities that may have been difficult to find, which is one of the advantages of online ethnography (Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2010).

I decided to become part of a selection of online communities and followed people on Pinterest, Instagram and Twitter. I also inhabited some of the private-public online spaces frequented by witches such as Second Life and Facebook and either took part in online meditation and group discussions or 'lurked' (Kozinets, 2010: 33). I observed the online interactions and postings but did not often post. Online closed groups that required passwords to enter in Facebook for example and/or were vetted by an administrator, required the use of Netnography[26] to gather data (Kozinets, 2010; Bowler, 2010) and so I became a member of the closed group. I was an 'outsider' due to the nature of my position as a researcher, however I was able to be part of the community of pratice because of my 'insider' status as self-identifying as a witch (Wallis, 2004: 196-197).[27]

[26] Kozinets (2010) introduced the Netnography to explain ethnography on the Internet

[27] See chapter one and the ethics section in this chapter for more details on my research position

I initially discovered who to follow and which groups to join through conducting online searches using search engines. I was conscious that I needed to be consistent in my search perameters when looking for groups, images and posts about witches because digital algorithms can affect searches (Campbell, 2018). Search engines recognise a user's location and consequently they are likely to offer results that reflect that particular hemisphere. Hence, I knew it was unlikely that my search would offer African or Eastern Witchcraft unless I put it in my search. I decided therefore to look for posts and groups that reflected the demographic of the Life History Narrative witches, and used the terms 'Witch', 'Pagan', 'Witchcraft' and 'Wicca'. I used the search engines Google.co.uk, Google.com, Bing, Norton Safe Search and the embedded search engines within Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. I chose these search engines because they were the platforms I was most familiar with and also Google.co.uk and Google.com were the search platform the Life History Narrative witches used the most. The search perameters that I used the most were 'Witch' or 'Witchcraft' but occasionally I combined them with words such as pagan, cunning, magic, spirituality and Wicca.

Hine (2000) notes that when researchers take part in online groups it is known as 'virtual ethnography' and since 2000 there has been a plethora of academics who have explored online participant observation and discussed the ethics that are related (see for example James and Busher, 2009; Kozinets, 2010; Salmons, 2012; Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce and Taylor, 2012; Boellstorff, 2008; 2015; Saadatdoost; Hiang Sim; Jafarkarimi and Hee, 2014). Online ethnography is similar to offline ethnography but with a few exceptions, mainly that it is difficult to prove who the

online respondent is. It may also be difficult to obtain consent to use a posting or image because, although it is on a public site, the individual may not have intended their posting to be used for research (McKee and Porter, 2009; Lynch and Sheldon, 2013). Furthermore, an image or quotation may be under copyright law[28] or intellectual property law, and it is difficult to obtain permissions to use it due to not being entirely sure who posted it or where it originated from (Boellstorff, Nadi Pearce and Taylor, 2012). Despite the complications, the advantages to conducting participant observation online outweighed the problems. Furthermore creative approaches to online research methodologies in the field of social science are growing, and so it is a valid method to use (Procter, Vis and Vos, 2013; Bunt, 2002). Hence all posts that I collected were in the public domain and have not been reproduced within the body of this thesis.

Netnography enabled me to meet individuals in a non-intrusive environment that they used everyday. I was able to gather qualitative data in real time and observe interactions between individuals in a way that is less intrusive than offline. In addition, the discussions became a digital archive and this supported validity of the interactions that I was observing. However, the problem of whether people were real and what they said was accurate, remained. Nevertheless, I accepted the presentation of online identities and understandings as personal truths to users because of my identity as a Life History Narrative researcher. Therefore, the data was valid to my study.

[28] Due to copyright issues the visual data will not be submitted to the online Library archive however live URLs are in Appendix two

I also decided to engage with offline ethnography so that I could blend practices. Baek et al (2011) suggest that individuals when online, are more radical and liberal with their deliberations, hence I felt it was useful to see whether what I discovered from blending offline with online ethnography would agree with Baek et al.

In addition to the online communities, I participated with offline national and local pagan communities and became a trusted member of a particular pagan group. I felt this was a useful part of my research because I was able to build trusting relationships and enrol participants for the Life History Narrative interviews. Furthermore, my participation ensured the community saw me as having integrity and although a guest, I was also part of the community of witches (Harvey, 2003; 2004). Without building trust and relationships, it was likely that the witches would not have presented their authentic selves to me, hence validity may have been compromised. A researcher's role is to accept what a participant tells them even if it is something strange or is usually kept secret. Therefore, accepting the participants as witches was important, especially as some of the Life History witches felt they had been ridiculed in the past, or were anxious about being known as a witch, as was the case with Sienna, Kelly and Sally.

I attended pagan moots, pagan festivals, pagan conferences and specific advertised events for example a presentation about fairies from a witch who I later interviewed. Such participation enabled me to observe Witchcraft and take part in some of the important practices that were identified in the narratives of the Life History witches and those online.

2.5.3 Visual and Written Methods

The third method that I conducted for this thesis was collection and analysis of visual and written posts within five social media platforms. From exploration of online groups and individuals it was evident that the same images were shared and many individuals identified with them or changed them slightly. An image, video or photograph can provide insight into various thinking processes of individuals (Emmison, 2016; Heath, 2016), and often an image that is retweeted or adapted for social media platforms can be a public declaration of personal preference and perspectives and becomes 'third-dimensional' data (Emmison, 2016: 305). A photograph is not simply an image that reflects an event, it can be a useful form of data that indicates a person's sense of self (Greenough, 2018) and represents cultural discourses. However, like all images the observer also brings their own prejudice and interest to the interpretation (Greenough, 2018). It is difficult to know the pure intention of the individual who posted the image at that moment in time and so it is important for a researcher who uses visual data to be mindful of this problem and not to assume its meaning or purpose.

To limit this problem, I explored the comments that were with the images so that the purpose of the image and meaning was clearer. Comments linked to images or posts were relevant because the language that individuals used provided some insight into their personal attitudes towards Witchcraft, Witch identities and personal life stories. It seemed that the images and comments became memes of what Witch was to the online community and they became a "vehicle for meaning" (Taylor, 2001: 6) about Witchcraft and how a witch practiced the Craft. The collective responses constructed

new meaning of specific pagan terms, for example the term 'Magick',[29] and reinforced meaning with regards to specific beliefs i.e. the Wiccan Rede.[30] So exploring the discourse (both visual and written) seemed a pertinent approach for my research thesis. Where comments from the person who posted the image were not included (such as on Pinterest) I looked at corresponding images within the platform so that a general understanding could be made through the associations. For example, if the image was of a naked witch on a broom, then associated images that were collated by the Pinterest search engine were often related to the sexualisation of witches, sex magic, skycladding or empowerment of women.

Analysing the online interactions associated with the images is a form of Conversation Analysis (Lim and Sudweeks, 2013) which is a method that, according to Meredith (2016) is gaining momentum with researchers. It requires the researcher to explore conversational language that is housed in online chatrooms for example and come to some form of understanding about how knowledge is sequentially constructed and how the online conversations develop some form of collective action and/or ontology (Meredith, 2016: 264). Although the analysis is complicated due to the number of people who become engaged in a conversation, Conversation Analysis can reveal how individuals systematically relate to one another and how they form and build ideas. Therefore when scrutinising the online conversational data that was attached to an image, I needed to be mindful of the intended audience for the post

[29] 'Magick' is considered by many pagans to be concerned with spell casting and energy whereas 'magic' is related to magicians and not Witchcraft

[30] The Wiccan Rede is a code of practice and is considered by many witches to be the foundation of their faith: *Do what you want but do not harm.* Some groups and individuals have however altered this slightly, but the rede or code remains important to many witches.

and then note whether it was intended for a "direct, indirect or overhearing recipient" (Meredith, 2016: 263). I came to realise that knowing whether the intention was for an idividual or collective group and knowing whether the post was for humour, learning or spell casting potentially affected the interconnectivity within the rhizome and the creation of what it meant to become Witch. Hence I explored how individuals responded to images and what others said about the written posts as well as the original image, taking attention of any tagging within the comments.

The data however did not direct me towards analysing the interactions in a systematic manner as is suggested in Conversation Analysis theory and so the analysis of my online data became a hybrid of Conversational Analysis and discourse. I did explore general conversations (who said what to whom and how they used language and image to convey meaning) but more specifically, I explored specific language and how it was used. I feel therefore that the method for analysis was a hybrid of Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis.

Taylor (2001: 7) suggests there are four stages of Discourse Analysis[31] but like Sharp and Richardson (2001) argues that this is an over-simplification of what Discourse Analysis is because discourse "means different things to different researchers and their audiences" (Sharp et al, 2001: 193). Taylor's stages however are still a useful guide to understanding the general purpose of analysing the discourses within social networking spaces because she suggests it is how language is used within a group

[31] Taylor's (2001: 7) four approaches to Discourse Analysis are

1. Analysis of language to see how it varies in different social situations
2. Focus on the activity of language use. The exploration of interactions
3. Analysis of patterns of language within a type of activity or theme
4. Looks at patterns of language in a larger context such as linked to 'society' or 'culture'

that is significant not the language itself. I used the collected data to explore 'situated language' within a social group. I explored how witches talked about specific terminology and used specific visual and written language associated with their Craft. This is related to stage three of Taylor's approaches to Discourse Analysis. Moreover, I looked for "patterns of language and related practices" (Taylor, 2001: 9) so as to consider what it means to be Witch, and the fluid nature of language meaning and construction, which linked to Taylor's fourth approach.

I explored an archaeological approach that enabled me to dig around the data and discover whether an image may have been reused within Instagram, Facebook or Pinterest. I then unpicked the statement or meme within the image and any comments that were attached to the post from individuals who did not do the original posting but found a connection to it. This enabled me to gather an understanding about how the community helped individuals to construct their own sense of what Witch meant to them, what a witch was and how people become Witch. I explored the use of particular terminology i.e. witch, the Craft or magick and how groups used them as a way to identify their practice or embodied selves.

2.6 Ethics

It is important to be aware of a researcher's position and how potential bias may affect analysis of the data and the validity of the conclusions. Lurhmann (1989) argues that her credibility would have been lost if she had acknowledged herself as a witch rather than an anthropologist, because her belief would have prevented her from being objective. Yet, arguing that a researcher must not be influenced by any of the practices and beliefs they encounter, thus claiming an "atheist methodology"

(Ezzy, 2004: 118) is impractical. As Harvey argues, it is impossible to be "objective or entirely subjective" (2004: 251) and according to Boellstorff (2008: 71) participant observation "is intentionally oxymoronic; you cannot fully participate and fully observe at the same time". Thus, a researcher should not choose a methodology because that is the norm within the academic field, or because it suits the participants, but choose a methodology that is suitable for the research aim (Herring 1996). Hence if one is ethically researching about witches then the researcher should not dismiss the part they may play within the research journey and data. A researcher should acknowledge their influence on the data. They should be aware of their potential faith bias when analysing the data.

Accordingly, I needed to be mindful that I did not 'go native' and become indoctrinated into Witchcraft because of the interactions in co-constructing Life History Narrative stories (Gemignani, 2014) and from the engagement in the ethnographic fieldwork for my thesis. However, during my PhD journey, I discovered that I was also finding my authentic self and acknowledged part way through my study, that my personal spirituality was in fact pagan. During the seven years of undertaking this thesis, I found that I had some affiliation with several practices and spiritual beliefs that I encountered on and offline. This made me acknowledge that I too am becoming Witch. If I had decided to become a witch because of the influences of the groups of people I interacted with, then it would be feasible to question the validity of my findings due to the potential loss of reflexivity

and criticality (Salomonsen, 2004). However, validity has not been compromised because I constantly took part in reflective ethics[32] (Roberts, 2015).

Recognising that I was becoming Witch meant that at the start of and during the collection of data I knew it was essential that I considered reflective ethics (Roberts, 2015: 316). I constantly reviewed my bias and reflected on whether my position as a researcher affected the data. This is like situated ethics (Calvey, 2008) and ethics in practice (Roberts, 2015) where a researcher is expected to address any ethical situations as they arose. However, I was reflective in-action and on-action, which meant that my ethical stance was constantly being reviewed. I continually questioned my behaviour, attitude and research position throughout the data collection, alongside reviewing any events that may have needed further ethical approval from an ethics board.[33]

Furthermore, I realised that being neutral was not necessarily helpful in the case of the Life History Narratives, because it ignored the personal relationships and trust that was being formed. Salomonsen (2004: 49) considers first-hand experiences as inductive rather than deductive and suggests that they can provide deeper understanding of the data. Hence being part of a community and thus an 'insider' was an important part of the methodological process. As an insider, I developed trust that enabled a better understanding of the stories being told. Yet to guarantee

[32] Roberts (2015) explores online research methods and argues that researchers should be reflexive during the research process. They need to review their ethical policy and practices at the start of the data collection but also at certain points within the process and at the end. He notes this as reflective ethics.

[33] My research project was approved by the Ethics Committee in the University of Wales Trinity St David in April 2013 before I started to gather the data

validity, I also had to engage with Strong Objectivity that ensured I looked at the first-hand experiences in a critical way (Harding, 1995; Rosendahl, Zanella, Rist and Weigelt, 2015). There was a potential for me to influence people's opinions through the co-construction of knowledge, and so I needed to take an objective look at the stories and acknowledge by bias when analysing them. Therefore, during the data collection, I was physically an insider to the community but remained a cognitive outsider when acting as a researcher.

Cowan (2006) suggests that 'outwith' is the better term to use than 'insider' because it explains a researcher is outside of a group, but they are also with the group and looking in. They are an accepted part of the community but stand outside it at times, so that they can look on in a dispassionate critical way. They use the inductive methods of participant observation to deduct conclusions about praxis but do not necessarily fully participate.

Belonging as a researcher to a community and not fully believing in the displayed praxis can however seem voyeuristic and disingenuous because the cognitive process critiques the accepted truths of the community. Harvey (2004: 251) suggests good research will, and should, change the researcher in some way and that the positions of insider/outsider and native are too narrow. He suggests that there is a third research position and that is of guest. As a visitor it is usual to take part in practices that may not happen in one's own house, for example removing shoes or sitting on the floor to eat. Although the guest may not agree with the practices, which may seem foreign to them, it is acknowledged that the practices are normal to the community that he or she is visiting, and the guest accepts them as truths:

> "Guesthood research then does not 'walk in the shoes' of the 'other, it sits across a fire and engages in mutually enlightening conversation" (Harvey, 2004: 253)

More, Guesthood implies a connection and a responsibility to the community and the engagement in respectful dialogue (Harvey, 2003). The research stance of Guesthood is sympathetic to experiential research such as anthropology and ethnography but is also co-constructed through various dialogues. It can be empathetic because through the lived experience the guest-researcher gains insights that may not have been acquired if they were dispassionate and removed. As Harvey notes, "to become a guest-researcher is to bow to the position/prestige of hosts and to struggle with one's own powerful position" (Harvey, 2003: 142).

My research position therefore has been a blend of Guesthood, Strong Objectivity and Outwith depending on the type of data that was being collected. As part of online and offline pagan groups, I became a guest-researcher and participated in speech act utterances such as "Blessed be" at the end of ritual or meditation, and used language that acknowledged pagan truths, such as the belief in a goddess and the awareness of magic, during interviews. However, I was often outwith or outsider/insider when I observed conversations within a closed chat room or collected public postings. Although James and Busher regard such behaviour as 'lurking' and to be ethically questionable (2009: 63), Boellstorff et al (2012) note that lurking within virtual worlds to be legitimate practise and akin to overhearing a conversation in a public place. Yet to make such practice more ethical, a researcher must always be identifiable (2012: 135). With this consideration in mind, I always ensured that my identity as a researcher was prominent and obvious through my profiles, behaviour

and comments. There was a risk however that whilst online, people would not be aware of my status and so on occasion I would re-post my purpose of being within a chat room or group and endeavoured to make my purpose for being online and engaging in interviews as clear as possible.

2.6.1 Ethics and Online Data Collection

As is routine with all research projects, ethics is an essential element that needs consideration. I gained approval from the university Ethics Committee before I started the data collection in 2013. Yet I also felt that, because I was collecting online and offline data, I needed to be clear before the project started about any potential research risk (BERA, 2018; Association of Internet researchers, 2018). I was conscious of safeguarding the personal identity of participants because often, the people involved in the Life History Narratives, had not widely advertised their pagan identity. This is not unusual for some, who self-identify as pagan, because they are in fear of reprisals from the wider community (Cowan, 2005). They feel they are expressing something different from the norm and prefer to keep their practice secret (Cowan, 2005: 64). It was essential therefore that all the recorded interviews, downloaded postings and responses that I collected were password protected and that all participants were given pseudonyms.[34] However, I was aware that keeping confidence could potentially be problematic when online.

Norton security software reminds users that nothing electronic can be deleted and somewhere it will be archived online and can be retrieved (Norton, 2020). Hence if

[34] See Appendix one for participant information

the only ethical consideration I had made were to give a pseudonym to participants within my published thesis and encrypt the downloaded material so that no one could access the data from my computer, I would not have fully protected my participants. The identity of my participants could still have been discovered if someone decided to post one of the quotes verbatim into an online search engine such as Google (Kozinets, 2010). The anonymity would have been breached thus making my research unethical. I therefore paraphrased any quotations and gained permissions from individuals if I wanted to use their private-public online postings.

Furthermore, I needed to consider the consensual issues related to public and private social media platforms. Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest, are public forums and so postings are freely accessible worldwide. Online researchers and ethics boards consider online posts within these platforms to be open access because they are published documents. Therefore, they are exempt from needing consent from the individual who created the post (Kozinets, 2010: 141; James and Busher, 2009: 123). Consequently, public online posts can be republished verbatim within a thesis or research paper (Eynon, fry and Shroeder, 2012). Although some areas of these online spaces are private, they are not accessed unless the individual allows it, hence in this case a researcher would need to seek permissions from the individual in the same manner (via email or instant messenger) as if they were face to face. Thus, a researcher can have implied consent when the post is public but needs written or verbal consent when the data is password protected or needs a private message request (Kozinets, 2010: 143).

However, Facebook is both public and private because although much of the space is for public use, there are private areas that can be accessed by invitation only. In this instance, anything that is public is available for research and, because it is in the public domain, permissions do not need to be obtained and there is an implied consent (Mckee and Porter, 2009). Yet individual posts within a closed group, needs the researcher to actively request consent, even if the content and postings are public within the group (James and Busher, 2009; Boellstorff et al, 2012). This is because the research is in an online private area.

Using digital media such as virtual blogs and public postings as data, has been criticised by some scholars (Mckee and Porter, 2009; Lynch and Sheldon, 2013). The argument is that the user may not have intended their original post to be part of research and so permissions need to be obtained. Although this is a grey area, I did still consider blogs and v-logs for my thesis and have referred to them when necessary within chapters four, five, six and seven.

Specific quotes and posts that I have used in this thesis have had permission (when necessary) from individuals. When they were from a closed online forum, I asked permission, although I avoided publishing them in the body of text. The Life History Narrative witches signed a research consent form at the start of the dialogue and understood that they had the right to withdraw their data and their permission up until the thesis is submitted.

I have used postings from public forums and limited quoting from closed groups because it was not always possible to gain consent. In some instances, I used implied

consent from the group when discussing a general observation. In this instance, I paraphrased and used the sentiment of the group rather than use an individual quote. It was not always possible to find the original creator of an image hence the copyright and intellectual property right was unclear. However, because the images were in the public domain and did not have a password to access, I felt it ethically sound to use them for my thesis. The images however have not been placed in the body of the essay to ensure that I do not breach any copyright law. It was an active decision to not publish images within the body of my thesis and they will not remain in the digital archive once published. However, because they enhance the discussion they can be located via live URLs.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has described the methods for data collection and it has justified how I have used and adapted an existing theoretical framework to analyse Witch becomings. I have used Rhizome Theory (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013) to explore the complicated online connections individuals make, and how they use them when they are becoming Witch. I then argue how I adapted Deleuze and Guattari's idea to create an innovative theory called Rhizome-Mycelium Theory. I explain how I have used the metaphor of fungi to explore how occasionally individuals connected with a group or another individual to create their own understandings of Witch. They produce a rhizome independent from the original source. This creates a new personal branch of Witch and Witchcraft which is then promoted through social media. The mycelium aspect of the Rhizome-Mycelium Theory represents the newly formed

witch identity. I argue that rhizome and mycelium are relevant when exploring creating and confirming faith identities.

The methods of online ethnography; Conversation Analysis and Life History Narratives has allowed me find themes and patterns in enriched data, and use it to evaluate how someone becomes Witch. I decided on a mixed methods approach for the data collection and analysis rather than one method because there was more than one kind of dataset. The data directed the method that was needed and the type of analysis required. This ensured a richer exploration of the data than if it was only one dataset and one method.

In this chapter I acknowledge that the 13 self-identified witches divulged their faith life stories and I used the transcriptions of the Life History Narrative interviews to categorise the responses into the themes that emerged. I originally considered using Nvivo software to do this but found that I preferred to colour code using highlighters. I chose this method because the digital Nvivo software was not always reliable and did not always save my work. I then triangulated the Life History Narrative themes with the themes from the online dataset and made conclusions related to my research aims and questions. I also engaged with offline participant observation and took part in pagan moots, festivals and conferences which enabled me to gain trust from the community and build relationships as is necessary when conducting empirical research.

The second dataset was online visual and written posts. I engaged in Netnography (Kozinets, 2010) and joined public groups within Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube,

Instagram and Twitter. I also joined private Facebook groups and engaged in online ritual, meditation and occasionally posted comments or images relevant to the discussion. I communicated with group members and was part of the online pagan comminity as a researcher but also as a witch. The dataset were images, comments, screenshots, video, blogs and hyperlinks to websites. I analysed the visual posts and the written comments through a hybrid of Conversation and Discourse Analysis (Meredith, 2016) to identify how language was used. I also analysed connections between the interactions so to explore emerging themes and identify rhizomatic or mycelium behaviours.

All research was conducted ethically, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study if they wished. From online public declarations of my position as a researcher, all participants were informed that they were part of a PhD research project and the nature of the research. Implied consent was enacted when the posts were public and permissions obtained when private comments needed to be used. I also acknowledged my position as a researcher and a witch and so conducted my research within the ethical frame of Guesthood, Strong Objectivity and Outwith.

The next chapter will explore the literature that relate to the themes of this thesis. It will establish the positions of Witch and Witchcraft within identity studies, mediatisation of religion and Paganism.

Chapter Three: Establishing Witch (Literature Review)

"No longer limited by geography in our search for kindred Pagans, we are limited only by the speed of our computers and our ability to use them."
McSherry (2002: 4)

This chapter discusses literature from various fields and explores the themes that relate to my research thesis. The key literature within this chapter discusses identity formation, the construct of space and place and the mediatisation of religion and Witch. In addition, I address specific themes that have been raised from the data and relate them to the literature in this chapter. The purpose of this chapter therefore is to establish how my thesis of becoming Witch is supported by existing literature and research.

3.1 Mediatisation of Religion

The research field of religion has developed rapidly since the advancements of communication technologies to involve discussions about digital religion and the mediatisation of religion[35] (Campbell, 2012; Hjarvaard, 2011; Morgan, 2011). Scholars such as Heelas and Woodhead (2004); Castronova (2007); Knott, Poole and Taira (2013) have argued that religion is not necessarily on the decline but is being redefined because the interpretation of what it means to be religious has changed. Church attendance may have declined but religious references are embedded in the everyday through popular culture and the media (Hoover and Schofield-Clark, 2003;

[35] Mediatisation of religion relates to how religion is represented on the internet, in gaming, news reports, advertisements, film, books, music and popular culture. The concept explores how religion is represented in all forms of media. For more details of this concept please review Campbell 2012 and 2013; Campbell et al 2011; Martino, 2013 and Knut, 2018

Copley, 2008; Detweiler, 2010; Knott et al, 2013; Nash, 2017). This suggests therefore that religion still has some relevance and significance in what is essentially, a secular society (Reader, 2012). Turkle suggests that it is human nature to find meaning in the ordinary and she argues that evocative objects are "companions to our emotional lives" (2011: 5) hence the connection to them can become examples of how individuals experience the sacred within the profane. Although in Turkle's examples the objects are mainly secular rather than religious, the emotions, attachments, evocations and activities related to the items can make the object sacred because of the meaning that is associated with it (ibid). The object carries significance because the individual or social group say it does (Lynch, 2011).

It is understood that the connections between popular culture and religion blur the distinction between what is religiously sacred and what is not (Detweiler, 2010; Wagner, 2012). Cult TV programmes that are readily available on the Internet, such as *The Simpsons* (1989 to date) and *Southpark* (1998 to 2015) have considered religion to be part of human experience hence have enjoyed satirising it, especially with Christianity. Music videos such as Marilyn Manson's version of *Personal Jesus* (2004); Lady Gaga's *Judas* (2011); Katy Perry's *Dark Horse* (2013) and Beyonce's 2017 pregnancy photographs of her posing like the Virgin Mary (Edwards, 2017) use highly theological images that are culturally iconic and iconoclastic. But also, according to the comments below the YouTube videos and Instagram posts, the content has caused offence to some religious communities. Furthermore, religious artefacts such as Roman Catholic rosary beads, images of the Virgin Mary and Buddha can be bought online and are advertised as pieces of jewellery or art,

clothing, toys, ornaments, writing implements or tattoos rather than religious items or subjects of reverence.

Shields (2010) uses the example of the 'Buddha bikini' to discuss how the use of Buddhist iconography on a bikini became a problem for some Asian Americans and Asian Buddhists because the images were used in a secular rather than religious manner. The controversy seemed to be that the image of the Buddha was displayed on the model's bikini and she was standing in a provocative manner. Portraying the Buddha as an overweight jolly ornament such as in the advertising campaign with a furniture store (Harveys, 2007) or using gay priests to sell ice cream is seen by some as trivialising religion (Shields, 2010: 85). Also, sexualisation is often used alongside religious images and cultural tropes to sell, as is exemplified with Antonio Federici's advertising campaign in 2010; causing offence to some religious communities and is seen as unnecessary. However, Shields (2010: 97) further argues that using an object or icon that has sexual connotations and/or repurposing a religious image, is also evident in the fractions of some religions and so using them for a non-religious purpose should not be considered offensive. She argues that images that are a parody or satirise religion can become a catalyst for rethinking conventional attitudes within faiths and society in general. Indeed, a church in New Zealand (St Matthew's in the City, 2009) frequently uses religious images with a modern theme on the billboard in its ground to encourage theological questions from the public. Likewise, the nativity parody from the bag company *Mulberry* (2015) equates a handbag as a sacred gift and although is secular, it raises the same theological questions as the *Christmas Starts* with Christ campaign (no date) hence has a similar purpose of instigating discussion about religion.

Hjarvard (2011: 128) uses the term banal religion originated from Billig (1995) to explain practices and ideologies that may blend features from institutionalised religion (such as crosses and prayers) with elements usually associated with folk traditions and superstitions such as trolls, vampires and black cats crossing streets. He notes such practices as banal because the elements are not necessarily recognised as religious (or sacred) because they can evoke emotions and actions that imply supernatural agency (ibid). Hjarvard argues therefore that practices and ideologies can be both profane and sacred. It is interesting to contemplate banal religion when a non-religious object is used for religious ritual, for example a computer, and consequently its significance adjusted. Hjarvard's concept of banal religion further highlights the computer's potential to be used as a secular-sacred tool and cyberspace as a readjusted secular-space for religious praxis (Helland, 2002; Detweiler, 2010: 9).

Cyberspace is a non-stratified and non-hierarchical platform that allows individuals freedom to explore identities that the offline environment may not permit. Yet on the other hand it can fetishize difference and shape identities to fit cultural norms (Bell, 2000: 117,139,140). To some, cyberspace and "techno-utopian ideology" (Sardar, 2000: 751) can be a distraction from the everyday, and due to the perceived lack of spirituality in today's world, it does not necessarily encourage sacrality or enable true community. Yet play, ritual and gaming online can become mystical for some individuals, "elevating us to a higher plane" (Detweiler, 2010: 8). Therefore, the computer and cyberspace in general can become a tool for exploring religious identities and sacrality.

Play is part of culture and it can help to form personal identities and a sense of community. This is possibly because

> "the feeling of being apart "together" in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game" (Huizinga, 1955: 10).

Hence gaming and being online can have a sense of the sacred because there is a shared understanding of what the online community considers to be important. This is relevant to my thesis because self-identified witches explore and play with online communities and cyber-cultures to form their sense of self and personal spiritualities. Playing with online communities is part of the rhizome that enables Witch becomings.

Kennedy suggests that the computer "is a different form of travel" (2000: 14) and cyber-culture is a convergence of humans with technologies. He argues that human behaviours and perceptions are likely to change because of the continuous use of technology to explore ways of being and becoming human. Furthermore, Wagner (2012: 112, 116) notes that when individuals (technomonists) use online spaces they naturally explore who they want to be and who they currently are. This exploration of identity may include a faith-based or spiritual identity. To a technomonist the virtual space functions as a sacred space (Wagner, 2012: 118), and the individual simultaneously sees himself or herself within the online space, as both real and virtual. Thus, a technomonist inhabits cyberspace rather than simply visits.

3.2 Digital Religion

Campbell is a prolific writer in the field of digital religion and the mediatisation of religion (see for example 2012, 2014, 2018) and notes that there should be a respected and recognised place for discussion about religion and digital media (2013). She argues that Religious Studies and sociological research should represent what is happening online (ibid) and that includes all faith traditions. The concept of digital religion has grown since the 1990s (Beaudoin, 1998) and there is a developing body of knowledge that has tried to explain the reasons behind its popularity (see for example the work of Brashar, 2001; Dawson and Cowan, 2004; Mazur and McCarthy, 2011; Hjarvard, 2011).

Helland (2000; 2005) suggests that digital religion is represented in two ways: Religion Online, where a webpage may provide information about religion and faith, and Online Religion that practices ritual and prayer through chat rooms and live video for example ritual and prayer. Some aspects of the digital religion, he suggests, are housed within social media spaces and the content addresses religious dogma, ritual and belief system. This is performed in the form of speech acts (Helland, 2005) indicating that the Internet is not simply a repository of knowledge but is also a place for praxis such as ritual.

O'Leary (1996), has questioned the sacred nature of digital rituals and online pagan practice suggesting they are not authentic, but Dawson noted that pagan "cyber-rituals do seem to be performing one of the traditional functions of religion" within a postmodern paradigm (2005: 22). He argues that reflexivity is crucial to developing spirituality, and so the Internet is offering alternative approaches to religious

expression that may be useful to religions surviving (ibid). However, there is still debate as to whether religious ritual and practice can be truly authentic and sacred when online (Cowan and Hadden, 2008).

Much research about digital religion has explored epistemology or ontology of religion. For example, Schwarz (2013) analysed the use of camera phones to film usually male-only Jewish ritual, thus enabling women to be virtually present without breaking religious laws. Similarly, MacWilliams (2006) analysed the online practises of American Independent Buddhists and how they used online platforms to develop sacred rituals that usually required a physical presence and place. MacWilliams acknowledged the controversy within the Nichiren Buddhist community and questioned the religious authority of downloaded sacred rituals (Gohonzons), and the power attributed to individuals who used the freedoms of the Internet. The result of such power was the loss of control of religious leaders. However, individuals who did explore Gohonzon ritual online considered their practise to be part of the original purpose of the Nichiren tradition and suggested that the Internet was a useful vehicle that enabled belief systems and practises to be widely spread for a "human revolution" (2006: 113). MacWilliams concluded therefore that the Internet was a powerful and "sacred technology that liberates" religious praxis (2006: 116).

Cowan's (2005) comprehensive view of how pagans interact online raised the same issues as MacWilliams. However, he also discussed the problems with online authority and the shift in power from the institutionalised religion to the individual. He further considered how the online environment created weak ties and therefore religious affiliation to a new religious movement was more likely to be fickle,

transient, and unsustainable. Yet Schwarz (2013) concluded that using technologies for religious ritual is the way forward to making faith fully inclusive and in some cases will make religion more meaningful. Research such as Schwarz, McWilliams and Cowan therefore are useful for establishing how a person uses online platforms and digital religion for religious practice and to become Witch.

Examples such as these indicate a Western paradigm shift where religion is blended with the everyday and in some cases has become a cultural trope rather than a religious observance. Wagner (2012) notes that using media is part of a person's normal everyday practise within the 21st century, and so it makes sense that a person will use it to express and discover what spirituality and religion means to them personally. The merging of religion and popular culture becomes an interesting phenomenon for social and religious scholars to research (Mazur and McCarthy, 2011: 2) and demonstrates how the sacred has become blended with the profane. For example, according to Lauricella and Alexander (2012: 16) hip-hop can be considered "a current manifestation of both the holy and the profane", and hip-hop lyrics in an online blog include words and metaphors that are traditionally seen as sacred. They advocate that sacred and profane blend well in today's Western culture because in a postmodern world, many people use the Internet to explore personal inner conflicts, some of which may be religious in nature, and express this through an online platform that is not usually used for religious practices.

More specifically, Sherlock (2013: 172) introduces the term "digital hierophanies" through discussing "digital necromancy", and argues how through the Internet (in particular social media) it is possible to 'resurrect' people who have died so to keep

their ‘celebrity’ alive (ibid). She argues that any digital material that was written by the deceased for example blogs or social networking posts, could be used to “connect to the sacred” (2013: 172) and become a manifestation of the sacred to some users (but not necessarily all). Suggesting therefore that in the 21st century, users can create online shrines to ensure the person is still socially alive although physically dead, and even though a user may not conform to a particular faith tradition, their online presence is treated with similar reverence to a graveside or religious shrine.
To Sherlock, the virtual space manifests the sacred yet Lauricella et al (2012) suggest that it is the ontology (i.e. the utterances of the individual) that are manifestations of the sacred rather than simply the space they host or visit.

O’Leary (2004: 37-58) explores the concept of how the sacred is manifested through text utterances within Neo-Pagan chat rooms. He noticed that virtual objects used in pagan rituals were still significant because they were imagined and became a form of speech act (ibid; Helland, 2005: 5). Through a web chat tool, the religious practice was performed by telling each other what was to be imagined and as such was actualised in the mind of the witch. The virtual was considered as sacred. This was because the online space became qualitatively different (O’Leary, 2004) from other chat rooms due to the praxis of the participants. The virtual space became a sacred space because the group agreed it to be a platform for ritual.

Through ritual and rites of passage, which Huizinga (1955) claims are a form of a play-performance, participants reify the actions and see the space as a purposeful and real environment to explore who they feel they are, or who they wish to become. Therefore, wearing a cassock, robe or tallit, and then undertaking an online ritual

through utterances is no less playful than wearing a waiter's uniform and setting the table on a digital role-playing game. Yet the former has a more personal significance. Ritualised play/performance (be that online or not) is part of human culture, and although 'play' is not always taken seriously, it has the capacity to be less child-like, as is the norm, and enable individuals to "move above it into the realm of the beautiful or sacred" (Huizinga, 1955: 19). Hence performing online rituals can "legitimise an authentic new space into which human beings can actually enter in some meaningful kind of way" (Wagner, 2012: 116).

Research, such as discussed above, suggest that the Internet may have elements of the secular and social sacred (Hejuk, 2010: 279) within it because of the practices and associations people have with certain sites and how individuals use the digital media to express religious or spiritual ideologies. However, Cowan (2005) argues that the rituals within the online logs of cyber-covens do not necessarily show sacrality because the practice offline would be different to online. He observes how it is difficult to be truly present when online and take part in imaginary ritual. This would be due to logistical issues such as lag in computer time and typing rather than speaking a response, and therefore it would be challenging to remain fully aware of the elements of the ritual (2005: 145). It would be difficult to claim that chat logs are sacred spaces or contain sacred ritual because "online is not a place, per se, it is a mode of communication" (Cowan, 2005: 138). Nevertheless, it is understood within Witchcraft that it is the witch's intention and imagination that is the key to a successful spell and ritual, and so Cowan's argument could be challenged. Furthermore, although online is a "mode of communication" (Cowan, 2005: 138)

people do inhabit spaces and share intimate moments making the space therefore less utilitarian and more meaningful than it first seems.

Since the beginnings of the Internet, pagans have created and established a strong online presence (Berger and Ezzy, 2007: Xiv). Often, they are identified as Neo-pagans and a new religious movement (see for example O'Leary, 1996; Dawson, 2005; Helland, 2005). However, some pagan groups would strongly disagree with this term because they consider Paganism to be an ancient tradition.

The online platforms have become one of the main places for individuals and communities to explore their witch identities and develop an understanding of Witchcraft. This is because the structure of the networked spaces, encourage online users to create and recreate ideas and identities, and follow an exponential path (Berger and Ezzy, 2007). Social networking spaces, therefore, are possibly the most effective spaces for individuals to explore the ontological and epistemological constructs of Witch identities and use such platforms to become Witch. The next section discusses this in more detail.

3.3 Mediatisation of the Witch

There is a plethora of film and fiction that include a witch as the main character but to list them all here would not serve the purpose of this chapter. However, it is worth noting how Witch is portrayed within digital and printed media because it provides some insight into some of the discourses around Witch that have been raised within the findings of this thesis. It is necessary therefore to reflect on how the identity of

Witch has progressed in such media so to begin to understand how someone becomes Witch and how such media may affect them.

3.3.1 The Fictional Witch in Media

Gerald Gardner, often cited as the founder for of modern Witchcraft, published a fictional text in 1949 that provided some insight into occult practices and Witchcraft. However, it was only after the repeal of the Witchcraft Act and the Fraudulent Mediums Act in 1951 (where the threat of imprisonment or fines was lifted) that he published his seminal non-fiction text *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959) that openly identified the practices and beliefs of Witchcraft. Since then the UK and USA have had a flood of textbooks on how to be a witch from authors such as Starhawk (1979 to date); Scott Cunningham (1988); Doreen Valente (1993); Douglas Ezzy (2003 to date); Lisa Lister (2017); Laura Lipscombe (2018); Harmony Nice (2018) and Amanda Yates-Garcia (2019) alongside an upsurge of websites. Suggesting therefore that there is an increasing interest in and access to occult practices. Witch in media however is often in discord with the occult textbooks because some pagans feel that they include inaccurate portrayals of Witch (Lister, 2018).

Film and fiction have often portrayed a witch as either an evil hag or incompetent older women. This could be because there is a widely held perception that older women "lack creativity, [are] unable to learn new skills, are unproductive… ill, frail, dependent, asexual and lonely" (Swift et al, 2017: 198). Robinson, Callister, Magoffin and Moore (2007: 209) discovered that Disney films portrayed "a sizeable number of negative stereotypical traits" of the older woman that included imagery such as crackly voices, stooped shoulders and saggy breasts. They argued that the

messages in the digital media "help[ed] form or reinforce negative attitudes toward older people" (2007: 209). Although gender was not specifically part of their study, many of the villains were female and they were the most memorable characters, thus may have contributed to prejudices.[36] Whether the prejudicial ageism affects perceptions of age or perceptions of witches and Witchcraft is inconclusive (Palmore, 2001: 572-574). Nevertheless Iser (1972: 287) argues that what a child reads, will affect their identity in some small way and attitudes towards ageing can affect the type of adult a person becomes (Nelson, 2016: 194). Witch identities exemplified in some media therefore, are purely a reflection of society's age-related stereotypes and view of women in general. Thus, when there is a substantial selection of media that depicts a witch and age in a negative or stereotypical way, then it is likely that this becomes a socially agreed understanding.

Conversely, some media do present an older witch as kind and trustworthy, but it is because she is not very good at Witchcraft. She is incompetent and therefore unable to harm. Swift, Abrams, Lamont and Drury would note this as an example of benevolent ageism rather than hostile ageism, i.e. society or an individual would see "older adults as warm, but incompetent" (2017: 200) and adds to the idea of ageing women being inept and insignificant to the youth and society in general (Henneberg, 2010).[37] Witches are portrayed as hag-like, and have stereotypical pointed hats but it

[36] 22% of the major characters in the 35 Disney films that were analysed in this study were villains. (Robinson, Callister, Magoffin and Moore, 2007: 207)

[37] For example, the *Meg and Mog* series (Jan Pieńkowski) has a Witch (Meg) and her familiar (Mog the cat) who often uses spells to resolve a problem, but Meg is forgetful and not very good at spell casting so she ends up in bother. Similarly, the book series of *Winnie the Witch* (Valerie Thomas) and *Simon and the Witch* (Margaret Barry and BBC TV series in 1987, 1988) portray a post-menopausal woman who is forgetful, bumbling and makes many mistakes.

is the familiar (usually a cat) that is more competent at Witchcraft. Thus, a witch is presented as having some agency (i.e. they can change circumstances through casting spells) but they are also incompetent because the spell goes wrong, are uneducated, illiterate, eccentric and/or strange. Because of such qualities they are not taken seriously.

Henneberg (2010: 128) suggests that older women have been stereotyped as the wicked witch, selfless godmother or demented hag, and argues that this is a disservice to women because Woman is more than these categories. Within some digital media, women have been discriminated against due to age and this distorts the reality of getting older as a woman. The messages are that an older woman in society may only have personal agency if she is evil, therefore is powerful, or she is demented and has an over-zealous attitude to Witchcraft. A woman who is forthright with speech and action may be viewed as a threat to patriarchy and so she will be framed negatively - hence a witch - and seeing Woman as an evil witch is a patriarchal trope because the older woman offers nothing to society, now that she is unable to bear children (Rountree, 1997: 226).

However, Pearson proposes that within feminist Witchcraft and Wicca, the hag is the most valued Witch identity (2010: 121). She and others have explored the three stages of a woman's life within Witchcraft: The Maiden, Mother and Crone, which can also represent the waxing and waning of the moon's cycle (Berger and Ezzy, 2007: 169; Crowley, 1996: 138-151; Harvey, 1997: 38). All stages are valued because they provide a more holistic view of Woman (Schutten, 2006). It is acknowledged that the wisdom of the crone, on occasion also known as hag or

cunning woman is essential for the younger members of a coven because she knows more about the Craft from her many years of experience and study. Her wisdom is something to celebrate (Crowley, 1996: 150). She has a purpose to share her knowledge and wisdom, and is still seen as a sexual, confident agent in her own life and is a representation of the Triple Goddess. Indeed, for some, the crone may be a representation of the female psyche that permits women to show negative emotions in a society that is not tolerant of female empowerment (Luhrmann, 2001: 30).

However, Sharrett's (2014) critique of horror as a genre suggests that the portrayal of Witchcraft and witches as primitive and dangerous, could be because horror is still a popular genre and witches are therefore marketable. Indeed, some of the more gruesome imagery of the hag within horror, may be an "aesthetic realism and cultural relevance" (Tompkins, 2014: 37) and so a reflection of the insecurities within society. Eating children and human sacrifice is not a ritual that happens within Witchcraft, however their portrayal within film may be an allegory of how society does not necessarily protect the vulnerable such as children, the elderly and minority religions. Consequently, film directors have used the direction as opportunities for reflexive critique (Badley, 2004). Indeed, Tompkins (2014) notes that horror genre within the 'golden age of horror' has been considered remarkable because of the subversive, psychological thrill within them and the ability to critique the messages. In this instance the horror messages are that Woman should be feared.

In addition, media representation of Witch as an evil, old, mistrusted hag may be the result of how society others those groups and individuals who are misunderstood or feared. Othering is a phenomenon that happens when society fears what they do not

understand and is a term that "describes the distribution of power" (Creutz-Kämppi, 2008: 297). A community may be targeted for their religion, dress, behaviours and lifestyle for example, and are presented by society as not like us. Green (2009) argues that there are many examples of othering and slavery within the Harry Potter series (1997-2007) and suggests that the adult reader naturally focuses on the social justice issues that are raised. On the one hand it is fair to say therefore that the witch may be presented as a hag so to encourage the older viewer and reader to reflect on the injustices held within society. But on the other hand, it might be because female witches as evil hags relate to ageist attitudes (as has been addressed earlier), or to Feminist Witchcraft that focuses on female only membership and the empowerment of women.

The next consideration is that there is a trend in some media to portray a more positive view of a witch. She is empowered, strong, chooses to use occult powers for both good and evil and is sexually confident. Exploring sexual identities is a natural stage of personal development and because 'sex magic' is an element of Witchcraft, it is reasonable for it to be represented in media.

Sexual intercourse has been considered a sacred act and a ritualistic part of Wicca since Gardner and sex magic is a method for understanding the self (Green, 2009; Crowley, 1996: 221; Gardner, 1950: 31, 79, 80; Ezzy, 2003; Ezzy, 2014; Crowley, 2018). The Great Rite where a priest and priestess have sexual intercourse (whether symbolically with the wand/athame and chalice or physically together) explores the personal relationship a witch has with the God and Goddess. It is considered an act

that invokes divinity. Exploring ritual whilst naked[38] has also been a normal practice for witches and so the body is something sacred and not hidden. The female witch is powerful because she is body-aware and at times experimental with her sexuality. Sex and sexual urges are not seen as something to be ashamed of or taboo. For girls this can be quite liberating because much rhetoric about sexuality is male dominated and girls are usually shy about their wants and needs (Chambers, Tincknell and Van Loon 2004; Currie, Kelly, Pomerantz, 2007).

Research such as Chambers et al (2004); Gruber and Fineran (2016) has suggested that young females have been insecure about dealing with male sexual dominance, which has often been presented as verbal sexualised abuse from boys within everyday situations. They are also not always confident with openly expressing their sexual needs and preferences (Bay-Cheng and Fava, 2014) especially if they are homosexual (Chambers, et al 2004). Consequently, some media may depict female witches as confident with their sexualities in order to provide young girls and women with alternate role models and attitudes to what they may see or hear around them; thus, permitting them to be reflexive whilst forming their own sexual identity (Jarvis, 2008). The digital media is possibly enabling girls to feel that they can go against what is considered the norm, whilst also legitimising sex as a part of life.

Being sexually confident is often part of Witch identity, thus Witch identities offer young women "an aura of danger and perversity while still embracing accepted norms of sexual behaviour" (Pearson, 2005: 40). The positive portrayal of a witch therefore permits a woman to feel empowered so that she can create the life she feels

[38] Worshiping or conducting ritual naked (usually outside) is called skycladding

she deserves. Ezzy notes this as self-ethic (2003a: 50) and the practice of Witchcraft "facilitates this process of self-reflexivity through various spiritual techniques" (2003a: 51). Within film and printed media, the messages are to embrace all of what it means to be a woman and not to apologise for it, which is a common motif within Wicca and Feminist Witchcraft (Lister, 2017; Pearson, 2010).

Finally, on occasion, fictional witches are intuitive herbologists, rather than evil hags; sexually charged individuals, or supernatural beings. There are examples in some media where witches have a quiet everydayness about practicing Witchcraft.[39] They are not seen as evil, dangerous, incompetent or eccentric, but portrayed as eclectic, different to the norm, and mysterious. They use herbs within their everyday life and have an uncanny sense of knowing when things will happen. They are not othered or given to ageism, moreover they are useful to the community and are well liked. Their Witchcraft is personal and is used in ways that are similar to the idea of the cunning woman in medieval times (Hutton, 2017).

During the 1950s, 60s and 70s, fictional images of witches such as within film and printed media, portrayed an idealised example of the female, and represented the way society viewed women at the time. A witch was presented as being feminine and having tacit knowledge of Witchcraft, which she used to manipulate the world around her. For instance, she would use a well-known spell, ritual or poem to find a solution to a personal situation, which was usually related to the home and her personal life.

[39] Some examples are *The Good Witch* (Netflix TV series 2015 to date); the book *Brida* (Paulo Coehlo, 1990) and the *Mrs Darley* book series (2008 to 2016) see bibliography for references

Postmodern examples from mid 1990s to early 2000 presented witches as blending ancient rituals, ideas and spells with new techniques. The women created their own spell and amalgamated or doctored an old spell from the Book of Shadows[40] to make it personal. The witch had a balance of tacit knowledge with learned knowledge to make their practice personal.

Therefore, the media's representations of a witch, possibly reflected the growth of alternative spiritualities and the new religious movements identified by Barker (2014) that occurred in the 1990s and early 2000. Individuals were more interested to find an individualised, eclectic approach to a personalised faith (Alder, 1986; Heelas and Woodhead, 2004). Moreover, such examples demonstrated more liberal attitudes towards sexualities, ethnicities and difference. For example, the witches portrayed within programmes such as Charmed (1998-2006) offered an open attitude to multiple partners, female pleasure, teenage sexuality and mixed-race relationships, albeit within a framework of heterosexuality and monogamy (Pearson, 2010). Hence such programmes represented the changing attitudes of society during this time (Copley, 2008) and the growth of spiritual consumerism and the reconfiguration of religion in society (Harvey, 2016: 130).

Conversely Bauman (2007: 1) suggests that society cannot rely on a static form of modernity. Attitudes will change on a regular basis because of social networking, relationships and patterns of behaviour. Changes will force new forms of thinking,

[40] A Book of Shadows can also be known as a Grimoire and is a collection of personal spells and practises. Each book is personal and sacred to each witch.

which he says is fluid and constantly in flux and notes this as liquid modernity. Society will not be able to rely on guaranteed frames that help make sense of the world and this results in the shift in power so that individuals have more autonomy than previously seen. Liquid modernity suggests therefore, that in the 21st Century there is no monolithic witch identity and way of behaving. As Harvey suggests, "Paganism nor popular music is expressed in particular forms because there is no stable prior form awaiting expression" (Harvey, 2013: X).

Witches in the 21st century undertake a malleable approach to modern Witchcraft, meaning that there are many ways of becoming Witch. Media such as film and fiction present multiple, fluid identities of Witch that neither confirms nor denies an agreed Witch identity. Hence witches within such media frequently change how they practise Witchcraft and how they present their Witch identities. The online examples demonstrate the reflections of the open fluid representations of Witch within various traditions of Paganism.

Fictional liquid modern witches can be any gender and are portrayed as has having agency. Spells are written and cast for a modern purpose, yet many use an ancient language that is not English. At another time, the witch may not create a new spell but use an established spell from a Book of Shadows; and at another time she or he may create something completely new that uses the native mother tongue. Any approach is acceptable, and the witch is presented in both a positive and negative

light. Liquid modern witches can be presented equally in a normative and non-normative way.[41]

"Popularist" (Ezzy, 2003: 117) or New Age witches would be more inclined to identify with the positive images of witches (Berger and Ezzy, 2009; Cowan, 2005) however presenting witches with both positive and negative attributes is more realistic than a limited upbeat view of Witch. Ezzy notes that popularist Witchcraft "typically presents the Craft as positive, successful, sexy, popular and happy" (2003: 60) and notes that traditional Witchcraft is different to this because it presents the positive and negative elements of life. The binary of white and dark or good and evil is a misnomer because a witch will be both (Ezzy, 2006) hence some feminist groups have reclaimed the image of the crone. They celebrate her empowerment and power by worshiping the goddesses Kali, Hecate and Lilith (Arsal, 2014; Pearson, 2010).

The reason for such binaries could firstly be because many people are attracted to the young, vibrant, empowered, feminist representation rather than the old, uneducated and angry hag and so it makes sense that media reflects what people want (Ezzy,

[41] Examples of liquid modern fictional witches suggest that today's media does not portray an established way to practicing Witchcraft. Some examples are listed below:

- Netflix series *Witches of Eastend* (2013-2019). Witches are male and female and blend languages for spells.
- Netflix series Three (*The Coven*) in *The American Horror Story* (2013-2014). The witches are gender fluid, of varied ethnicities and one witch had down syndrome.
- Netflix series *The New Adventures of Sabrina* (2019-date). Portrays devil worshipping cult, liberal attitude to sex and multiple partners and witches are gender fluid.
- The new remake of the cult series *Charmed* (1998-2006) which was launched on the American CW television network in the Autumn of 2018. This series includes mixed race women and embraces more modern effects

2006). Secondly, as has been discussed previously in this chapter, it could also be because the images reflect Western society's attitude to age, and so images of young vibrant witches versus old incompetent hags is suggestive of who and what society values, thus demonstrates prejudicial, benevolent and positive ageism.

To summarise, a witch in the 21st Century is a personal construct. She or he may be old or young, be part of a coven or solitary, be able to create new spells and practice ritual, or not. Ultimately the identities of witches are not defined by what society decides them to be but, are constructed out of the individualistic view of the various examples that are in film, fiction, TV and other media. Witch in 21st Century media has a liquid modern identity, meaning that one day she or he may be a hag, the next a seductive housewife/house husband and the next a transgendered teenager. Each representation will, in some way, offer something to the audience and will help form a collective conscious of what a witch is. Thus, to decide which witch is the authentic witch, requires a less polarised representation of a witch and Witchcraft within film and fiction, but then again, that would not make good entertainment.

3.3.2 The Internet and Witchcraft

As discussed in this chapter, Witchcraft has developed a strong presence over the past decade within media and has promoted Witch as something that is mysterious, exciting and alternative. Berger and Ezzy (2009) note that popular culture, specifically the media's portrayal of fictional witches, has had an influence on a young person's self-identity with the faith tradition, and suggest that programmes such as *Charmed*, *Harry Potter* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* have provided a "set of facilitating social conditions which Witchcraft identities are formed" (2009: 502).

Yet witches are also present within other media such as the Internet and as such offer excessive Witch representations.

Some web platforms offer a user access to knowledge and information about the occult and Witchcraft in general, for example Witchipedia,[42] however there are other sites whose sole purpose is for social networking, for example Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube. Each of these platforms offer a multitude of opportunities that enable individuals to indulge in their own practice and create their own sense of self. In addition, because it is likely that individuals move from one platform to another rather than stay permanently with one website, it is feasible that they will collect an amalgam of ideas, knowledge and ritual related to Witchcraft and as a result produce a patchworked view of Witch. Indeed, social media platforms such as Pinterest actively encourage users to create amalgamated theme boards. Within Pinterest the images (with embedded hyperlinks) are collected so that when viewing, the images portray a macro board of the theme rather than the micro pin. The macro board demonstrates the individual's construct of a witch and Witchcraft.

However, as noted previously in this chapter, Cowan (2005) argues that a meandering snowball approach to gathering knowledge about ritual, faith and belief can cause problems with authority. He questions whether the content presented online is accurate. Moreover, he wonders how a user who may be vulnerable (because of their age or developmental stage or life-issues) avoids charlatans who abuse their position (Cowan, 2005). The user may become indoctrinated into a harmful cult or society. It is easier to protect oneself offline.

[42] http://www.witchipedia.com/ is a website that contains occult information for witches (accessed 18.7.18)

If there is an established authentic set of dogma and practices to a religious tradition, how a person worships, prays and interacts online will still have some form of authority, because of the heritage and established truths of that tradition (Karaflogka, 2006: 205; Hoover, 2002: 6). Paganism however does not have a set dogma hence, it is difficult to decipher what is an authentic pagan truth and what is myth (Cowan, 2005). Hence there is a gnostic authority (Cowan, 2005: 202) whereby anyone, any mobile device, or any App can state a religious truth and claim authority (Wagner, 2012: 105).

Hoover says "there is a truly different relationship to authority being articulated" when religion is digital (2013: 267). He argues that there are "new instantiations of authority emerging" (ibid) and that the digital media "encourages new modes of practice, and that it is the practice that defines what is going on and… not the authority" (ibid). This means that research in the field of digital religion should not be too concerned with whether there is an established legitimacy to what it means to be a witch. Research therefore needs to discuss how spiritualities are explored within digital media and how that media affects what it means to practice and become Witch.

3.3.3 The Identities of Witches

Moving on, Lister suggests that there are many forms of Witch identities and says that ultimately "being a witch… is the stance you take in life." (2017: 35). She notes from the various women she has worked with over the years that women take a hybrid of beliefs to create their own realities of what a modern witch is. Similarly,

Cowan (2005: 202) suggests that modern Paganism, especially when online, is self-created and comes with a non-authenticated authority. He argues that a witch may learn about Witchcraft from popular culture and this learning is reinforced through online chat rooms with others, but that such knowledge is likely to be inaccurate and may be potentially dangerous. Similarly, a Traditional Witch or Hereditary Witch[43] will believe that to learn the Craft a witch needs to work with a High Priest or Priestess and undergo a set of initiation rituals. Yet Lister's 21st Century take on Witchcraft suggests that how a woman gains awareness is irrelevant, it is more important that she is on a journey and is becoming aware of her power so that she is enabled to develop her intuition. She notes that the "modern witch movement is all about female empowerment" (2017: Xii) and is personal.

Pearson argues that the rhetoric of Witch and Witchcraft has historically been clothed in violence and that this has given rise to feminist witches, for example Daly- an witches, Starhawkian witches and Dianic Witches (2010: 147). The purpose of such feminist witches is to reclaim the word and the concept of Witch. She suggests that the witch has been a victim of psychological, patriarchal and physical violence throughout history, and women in the 21st century choose to reclaim the identities of Maiden, Mother and Crone so to raise awareness of female empowerment. Furthermore, Pearson states that a witch has been silenced hence, to identify as a witch, a person is resisting such violence. She argues that using the term witch is a symbolically violent act (ibid) that is meant to raise controversy.

[43] A Traditional or Hereditary witch is someone who has been initiated through a tradition such as Gardnerian or Alexandrian Witchcraft or someone who has learned the Craft from the mother's line (Lister, 2018)

The 1968 feminist movement Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (W.I.T.C.H.) used the discourses of Witch to protest capitalism and patriarchal tropes such as beauty pageants. The group was not considered to be religious or spiritual but political activists. Women would demonstrate their protest through playing with the visual discourse of pointed hats, black cloaks and broomsticks, using the widely agreed notion of Witch as wicked but powerful to get their message across. Akin to Pearson, the women in the movement were being symbolically violent towards the patriarchal cultures that they found themselves in.

The movement waned in the 1970s, however it is interesting to acknowledge that there was a rekindling of this movement in Portland Ohio in 2016. Some women felt the presidential elections that included Donald Trump were misogynistic and patriarchal (Bess, 2017). They were concerned about women's rights and so actively protested using the W.I.T.C.H acronym and played with some of the stereotypes of witches (Haute Macabre, 2017). A modern 21st century witch therefore has at times used the term in a political rather than a spiritual manner, and the individual (male or female) has played with the visual discourses available within the media to raise awareness of female empowerment and of the inequalities between genders.

Despite the reclaiming of Witch, the witch as scapegoat with violent undertones is still prevalent in religiously conservative and traditional communities. Mencej's research in the Styrian area of Slovenia has found that the evil witch is considered by the population to be responsible for misfortunes within the neighbourhood (2017: 343). It is believed that a 'neighbourhood witch' or 'village witch' would curse a neighbour so that some misfortune would happen. Mencej suggests that this way of

thinking is believed to be helpful so that the communities accept the negative aspects of life and move on from them. If the individual acknowledged the reason for the misfortune to be their fault, then depression may set in. Rather, blame is placed through a scapegoat witch (malevolent supernatural being that is hidden) hence the individual is "interpreting personal misfortunes as the consequence of another's malevolent agency" (The Religious Studies Project, 2017). Accordingly, although the witch is considered an emblem of female empowerment by movements such as within Feminist Witchcraft (Pearson, 2010; Rountree, 1997) there is still a mind-set in some communities that see her as the descendent of the rebellious demon Lilith from Jewish folklore (Arsal, 2014: 173) and so something to be feared.

Ezzy notes however that some of the modern spell books that advocate female empowerment can be questioned with regards to feminism because "they tend to set up idealised images of femininity and of witches" (2003a: 56) and so focus too much on what a woman should be rather that what she is. He argues that purchased media such as spell books and websites are focused on how to become seductive and obtain a boyfriend suggesting therefore that a woman should be seductive and have a boyfriend which is a patriarchal ideal. Yet Ezzy also argues that modern Witchcraft encourages the 're-enchantment' with life. Referring to Foucault's 'technology of the self', Ezzy suggests that the use of popular spell books, encourage taking control of situations that concern Witch and refocus attention to the self (2003: 52) which in turn empowers the individual whether they are a feminist witch, or not. They are not passive recipients of events but active participants that have agency. So being a witch involves manipulating areas of life through ritual and spells to holistically connect mind body and spirit. This in turn, creates a personal feminine identity. Ezzy calls

this “popularized Witchcraft” (2003a: 117) using popular media such as spell books, blogs and websites to form idealised witch identities.

As has been identified throughout this chapter, this thesis explores popularized Witchcraft and how individuals construct Witch identities that are authentic to their personal spirituality, political belief systems and sense of self. The following section of the chapter moves on to discuss identity formation and the use of online spaces.

3.4 Constructs of Identity

It is a well-considered notion that identity is part of self-concept and is constructed through the social interactions a person has with others (Bruce, 2015; Dweck 2017; Lovheim and Linderman, 2005). More, online users explore social networking spaces such as Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, and YouTube as modes to express personal and collective ideologies (Liu, 2008) and belief systems (Wagner, 2012). The images and written postings that are uploaded on social media and reposted or edited can become a bricolage (Rogers, 2012) of a person’s life, constructing what they believe, or what they want others to believe their life, religion and culture to be (Campbell, 2013). Hence the encounters within the media platforms enable users to widen their sense of self by seeing online profiles as “real” (Wagner 2012: 112). The Internet therefore is changing how people relate to each other and how individuals perceive themselves (Castronova, 2007). As noted previously, some users see online environments as inhabited spaces just as much as offline spaces, and such individuals are noted as “technomonists” (Wagner, 2012: 118).

Creating an online name and public profile is one of the first tasks of joining a social networking space such as Twitter, Facebook or Instagram. The name may not necessarily be a user's birth name but may reflect an interest and their self-concept in some way (Hagstrom, 2008) and/or a specific role (Boellstorff, 2010: 119). Choosing a name as part of the initiation into social media is similar to the rites of passage for some faith traditions such as Roman Catholicism and Wicca. Through Catholic Confirmation for example or through the Wiccan initiation ceremony, an individual is formally accepted into the faith and they are required to take a new name, thus demonstrating their transition into a new religious identity. Levitt and Dubner (2006: 130-204) suggest that the choice of a name represents how a person views themselves, which would be further supported by Bechar-Israeli (1995) who notes that many online names seem to reflect something of that person's interest or self-concept. Rogers and O'Connor (2017: 147) observed that transgendered individuals within their study explained how the label of a name carried power and was a way to validate their identity to others. Furthermore, the participants played with their self-chosen names, often online, before they openly announced their new transgendered identity. Although some do not appreciate labels because they may cause discrimination (Ferguson, 2015) labels can enable people to self-identify and express their personal becomings and journeys (Belous and Bauman, 2017: 59). Moreover, in some cases, the name can become part of an "anti-labelling movement within a new generation" (Belous and Bauman, 2017: 60). A similar sentiment, which has been discussed earlier in this chapter through the reclaiming of the name crone and using the acronym W.I.T.C.H (Pearson, 2010).

The infrastructure of social networking platforms encourages users to express themselves through a selection of categories, for example a religious or relationship status, and enables "personally constructed modes of self-understanding" (Wagner, 2012: 102). The profiles and networks show, in some small way, how a user sees themselves (Bandura, 1977). Furthermore, online responses to posts provide negative or positive reinforcements that may affect the person's real-life sense of self. For example, an updated status on Facebook can cause 'friends' to respond with messages and emojis that strengthen the person's positive or negative view of who they think they are. Thus, the online space becomes a powerful tool for constructing personal realities and identities that are influenced by interactions with digital media such as Apps (Wagner, 2012) and social groups (Campbell, 2018).

Massey argues however that many online relationships could be considered weak because (similarly to offline), online relationships happen because people naturally connect with "people-like-us" (2005: 95). She suggests that online networks can become akin to a gated community where ideas are not challenged, and honest exchange does not happen. However, some online users contend that people are likely to be more honest online because of the anonymous nature of the Internet and the use of a "virtual body double" (Hillis, 2009: 138). In some cases, they may even become more aggressive or/and more political than they would if they were offline, consequently forming strong ties that have a distinct community identity. A good example of strong digital ties is Abdel-Fadil's (2019) paper that analyses how the creation of a Norwegian Facebook group enabled a political grassroots movement for the right to wear the cross in a public area.

Wagner (2012) argues that people inhabit online spaces and social media research should be mindful of this. Even if the social networking space is a gaming platform or for entertainment purposes, the virtual space creates a sense of presence and thus should be acknowledged as having the potential for emotional attachment and identity construction (Boellstorff, 2008). Boellstorff noted online negative behaviour towards others as 'griefing' and acknowledged it can cause "real-life" distress to the residents[44] within Second Life (2008: 90-91) suggesting therefore that online networking is not as unconnected or unemotional as one might assume (Abdel-Fadil, 2019).

Winder (2008) explores the connection between virtual and real identities and suggests that because the Internet is anonymous it gives users freedom to escape from real-life issues such as disabilities. He discusses how many virtual bloggers and avatars are very different to the people at the other end of the computer screen and notes that online identity is different to offline identity because people are not their true selves when online (2008: 222). Steiner's 1993 cartoon of a dog on a computer in *The New Yorker* showed similar foresight (Cavna, 2013). The image portrayed a dog sitting on a computer with the strap line 'on the internet no one knows you're a dog'. The cartoon suggested that a user could be whoever they wished to be when they were online. The person at the other end of the screen would not know who they were communicating with (Wagner, 2012: 119) suggesting that individuals are not presenting their true self when online. As Campbell notes, "online identities are often

[44] Resident is the name given to a user who has registered with Second Life and has an avatar. Resident rather than gamer implies people live rather than play within the platform

based on created persona, which are deliberate misrepresentations of the real person" (2005: 48).

Warburton (2009: 417) develops this concept further and suggests that individuals like to play with identities especially whilst online. He notes that Second Life is an extension of real-life identities and not necessarily a new one. On Second Life residents can, through the creation of a 3D persona, present their identity in any way they wish for example a human, vampire, dragon, robot or an animal. There is more understanding that online identities may frequently change within virtual platforms and so there is a hegemonic view that identity is fluid (Boellstorff, 2008; Wagner, 2012: 99). Due to the nature of the Internet, it is customary to frequently change identities hence individuals have "liquid identities" (Filiciak, 2003: 92). Furthermore, "social media is one of the main spaces through which people perform their identity in relation to others" (Abdel-Fadil, 2019: 15).

Fachin and Davel (2015: 369) accept that "identity is in constant reconstruction" and a never-ending process. Their research combined the concepts of identity work and identity play to explore the tensions individuals face when trying to discover their authentic self. They argue that people temporarily play with identities that enable bridging into their future selves (2015: 372). Yet although there may be a perceived end identity-goal (defined as identity work) this will frequently change due to individual reflexivity (Fachin and Davel, 2015: 369). Identity construction they argue, involves individuals acknowledging, "who I am" whilst aiming for "who I want to become" (ibid). Hence individuals perform roles as part of the process of self-discovery (2015: 370).

Herminia, Ibarra and Petrigleri suggest that a safe place is needed for identity transitions and that "when adults play, they are rehearsing possible selves" (2010: 12). Turkle (2004: 2) and Kroger, Martinussen and Marcia, (2010) concur and suggests this is even more crucial for adolescents because their identity frequently changes. Turkle suggests that virtual world environments and chat rooms are the safe spaces or 'time out' places for identity play. Virtual world media may offer the chance to engage "in provisional but active trial of possible future selves" (Herminia et al, 2010: 11). However, it is impossible for a person to become a dragon, so the platform is more for balancing the imagined self with the authentic self so that there is less of an identity threat.

What is fascinating is the idea that construction of the self may be interpreted not as a monolithic identity, meaning that there is not one set identity that is related to a specific role (Brunsma, Delgado and Rockquemore, 2013). The self is constructed through multiple socially constructed roles and values (Gergen, 1991: 76). Identity may therefore be a make-up of more than one role hence creating a Multiphrenic self (Gergen, 1991: 76). A self that is influenced by the ideas of others and the surrounding social cultures.

Furthermore, Filiciak suggests that when identity is explored and presented online it is a "formation [of] a complex structure that we update incessantly by choosing from the multitude of solutions" (2003: 97). He notes this as "hyper-identities" that are liquid and never constant. Witch therefore has a multi-facetted identity that may blend discourses and often changes, as is with the concept of "polyphonic bricolage"

(Schmidt, 2003: 10). For example, using a wide selection of stimuli, a witch's identity could be created by blending the characteristics of an evil old woman with that of an empowered male sage. More, Witch could also be someone who identified with being transgendered, quiet, loud, married, single, old or young. There is no one fixed Witch identity, and no one fixed way of expressing it; "there is only ever always a nascent desire emerging" (Harvey, 2013: X). Such multiple identities could be presented on or offline depending on the audience and platform. They are created through the "different voices" of every individual (Schmidt, 2003: 10, 16) so that over time the different examples of Witch become accepted norms within the social networks.

More specifically, self has been categorised in a variety of ways, but researchers have commonly used the terms authentic self, (Cable, Gino and Staats, 2013) real self (Koole and Kuhl, 2003) and true self (Strohinger, Knobe and Newman, 2017). Strohinger et al (2017: 551) acknowledge that there is an identity that is surface and public (like skin) which they say is an epidermis view of self. Gilbert and Malone (1995) note that the public self may come with bias and may not reflect the personal. The true self is hidden, personal and unconscious. The true self has a supressed depth that is dormant until recognised and acknowledged. According to Bench, Schlegel, Davis and Vess (2015) it is the evaluation of and reflection on the changes to personal identities which happen over time, that enable individuals to make sense of who they are and discover their true self.

If changes are positive, then the person is moving towards actualising their true identity but if the change is negative, they are moving away from it. Moving towards

the true self is self-discovery (Bench et al, 2015: 170) and this is often represented in a "self-discovery metaphor" such as finding an image which represents a part of who they feel they have always been but have not necessarily fully acknowledged. Bench et al noticed that individuals had improved self-esteem because they had discovered their true self and preferred this identity to their actual day-to-day self. Thus, literature in the field of identity studies has tried to explore how religious experiences can provide authenticity, and how authentic a person is when they explore their identity, i.e. how true are they to themselves and how much of this truth is presented to others (Bell, 2001; Dawson, 2005; Hillis, 2009; Boellstorff, 2010).

Stohminger and Nichols (2017), along with Chen, Urminksy and Bartels (2016) suggest that the X-factor that affects a person's self-concept is their belief that they are fundamentally wired to be good. Furthermore, that being true to oneself is related to what individuals notice in themselves and how this is reflected in others (Stohminger et al, 2017: 552). Individuals often see themselves in a positive light and as morally respectable hence, "moral traits are considered to be the most deeply rooted, causally central aspect of a person's identity" (ibid, 2017: 554).

Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons (2002) suggest that the Internet is a useful platform to explore true selves and their research identified how individuals were more open and honest with strangers online than when they were face to face in a room. They argue that participants were quick in sharing morals and created strong bonds rather than weak ties because of the nature of the web platform. The ontology of the Internet permitted the participants to be free from normal social constraints and behaviours and therefore they felt there was low risk and hence shared personal

opinions, morals and stories. They stopped hiding their inner-selves and expressed what they truly felt (true selves) rather than what they thought they should feel (actual selves). The Internet enabled individuals to

> "express those aspects of self that he or she has the strongest need to express— namely, the 'true self': those identity-important and phenomenally real aspects of self not often or easily expressed to others."
> (Bargh et al 2002: 34)

It was the free nature of the expression that facilitated rapport and bonds between strangers.

Turkle argues similarly to Bargh et al but also notes that humans are "plugged-in techno-bodies" (1995: 177) meaning technology is part of a person's everyday behaviour and hence plays a part in identity formation. Identities she argues are multiplicities because the "self spins in all directions" (1995: 258). The Internet therefore can be the empowering force that enables an individual to self-actualise and find their authentic witch through self-construction and generating identity labels via social interactions and self-discovery metaphors. Identity is fluid and therefore is always in a state of becoming; this is also true of the Internet.

3.5 The Process of Becoming

Cristancho and Fenwick (2015: 1) note that becoming is a professional's continuous struggle to develop "capability, confidence and identity" and is related to the personal interactions within an environment. Like Deleuze and Guattari (2013), Cristancho and Fenwick note that becoming something; be that surgeon, doctor,

teacher, animal or machine[45] requires continuous change. The process of becoming something helps identity creation. The concept of becoming is related to the theoretical framework for this thesis and explained in more detail within the methodology section in chapter two, however some key literature is explored below.

Identity can be defined as being something (O'Sullivan, 2006) but becoming something has a subtle distinction. A person may describe their sense of self (being) with a discourse that is related to gender, race, place, ethnicity, occupation yet when a person is striving to become something else, the language is less certain and may (at times) be contradictory. Therefore, to become something requires a reflexive evolving approach to identity creation whereas being something has a more absolute discernment. Being has an endpoint, becoming has a meandering path to the unknown.

3.5.1 Studies that have Explored Becoming

Deleuze and Guattari explored the concept of becoming within their text *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (first published in French in 1980 and then in English in 2013) and suggested that becomings happen because of rhizomatic behaviours and encounters. They proposed that connections between two people, two places or two ideas for example, will affect the two but will exponentially affect more than two. Such connections create a journey that travels in various directions

[45] Becoming machine is a concept that Deleuze and Guattari discuss throughout their text (2013: 287; 292; 475) and can seem confusing because humans are not mechanical thus cannot become a machine. However, Deleuze and Guattari note becomings are like machines and have multiple assemblages that create something. Therefore, whilst a person is becoming, they assemble many parts to create whatever they wish to become hence they become machine. Braidotti however explores this further and blends human with machine thus creating the concept of cyborg.

depending on the effect the interactions have. Such maps are examples of a rhizome and each rhizome, as explained earlier in chapter two, is an example of a becoming (2013: 7).

Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong and Bickel (2006) explored the becomings of art teachers and mapped their identity creation. The participants saw themselves as having simultaneously multiple identities and self-identified as artists, researchers and teachers. Irwin et al therefore named this form of identity creation as A/R/Tography because the participants saw themselves as a multiplicity of identities that were individualistic but also blended to become one. The practice-based collaborative research suggested that identity construction was a "living inquiry" (2006: 71) and the A/R/Tography helped theorise how ideas and practices developed. The result was that the participants became artists, became teachers and became researchers through following the path of questions that kept evolving. The process of identity creation was reflexive and emergent.

Braidotti (2006) compared the philosophies of Donna Haraway and Giles Deleuze to explore becoming animal, becoming machine. She suggests becoming something is a useful concept for understanding new identities within social media or technology-mediated communications because identity is often constructed online. She challenges old ways of thinking about identity creation and argues that theorists should follow a pathway that refuses "hegemonic positions" (2006: 206). Thought should be a nomadic practice (i.e. meandering so that new ideas can be formed and reformed) and not follow a strict tracing of previous ideas but should be "joyful acts of disobedience and gentle but resolute betrayal" (2006: 203) to the original theory

so that new ontologies can occur. Essential to her understandings of Cyborg, Woman and Nomad, Braidotti considers identity as a becoming Cyborg/Woman/Nomad rather than a being Cyborg/Woman/Nomad.

O'Sullivan analyses Deleuze and Guattari's text and suggests that it is an "experiment in thinking differently" (2006: 2). He suggests that artwork is an expression of a world that is real to the artist rather than a representation, and that the artwork and artist form a mimesis (2006: 55) i.e. the artist and art become one identity. He suggests that, "being is static and fixes identity for all becomings are fluid and dynamic" (2006: 56). A person therefore cannot be something without the process of becoming something but becoming requires a personal journey for every individual. Such journeys are rhizomatic in nature for they are formed and reformed because of the multiplicity of connections.

To become Witch requires a process of learning about spirituality, ritual and symbols. Crowley notes Wicca to be a personal path that develops the potential for self-knowledge (1996: 3). Drury agrees but he also suggests that this happens through a "wisdom-path" named magic also known as The Craft (2004: 8). Obtaining the identifying marker Wiccan or witch is not important nor is whether the practitioner is part of a coven or is a solitary witch (Rountree, 2004; Ezzy, 2003). Continuously practising The Craft to enable a person to be knowledgeable of their "own inner psyche" seems to be the focus for belonging to Paganism (Crowley, 1996: 3). According to Lister (2017) the purpose of Witchcraft is to become Witch and that becoming is a life-long process. Initiation ceremonies can provide a person with the first step to being a witch but it is the personal journey that aids them to

becoming Witch. The path is considered not to be a final destination, but a route to a personal identity that may never be fully formed but will be influenced by experiences and encounters along the way (Ezzy, 2006).

Yet, to become something, it is important to accept the unbecoming of something. The process of self-actualisation and moving forward towards a newly formed identity means that individuals need to accept who they were and undo, or unbecome their past selves (Grosz, 2005; Starkey, 2020). As Rogers and O'Connor suggest "on the way to a new identity one has to discard what one has been seen as in order to secure the new identity as one's own" (2017: 156).

A person who identifies with Witch therefore needs to unbecome their former self, which could be a personal attachment to Christian or other faith dogmas for example, or ideas about woman-hood and feminism, or even notions related to the discourses surrounding Witch. To self-actualise, and become a (self-realised) witch, an individual will naturally unbecome previous becomings. They will explore imagination to re-conceptualise previously held social notions (Deleuze, 2004) to discover their authentic self and new truths. The process of undoing past identities to create new is likely to happen more than once (Sumsion, 2007). Hence previous beliefs and identities are frequently challenged because of the encounters and experiences that lead to different ideas about what Witch means. Reflections on such experiences enable the unbecoming of one identity and the evolution towards becoming a different one (Starkey, 2020).

This is true of Starkey's (2020) research. The conversations with her female participants identified that the women needed to dismiss their previous faith and unbecome Christian to fully convert to Buddhism. Starkey uses the word conversion to explain the unbecoming of one faith and accepting a new one (2020: 57). She argues that although her participants did not use this term she felt it described how an adult becomes a Buddhist. Although conversion is a useful word to describe the process of adults moving faith traditions, and much of Starkey's findings chimes with some of the themes within this thesis, conversion is not an expression that is used to describe Witch becomings. This is because the becomings of witches are slightly different to Starkey's Buddhists. Starkey's Buddhists were **a** Christian and then became **a** Buddhist, yet the witches in this study do not become **a** witch. It seems that conversion is an end, whereas a becoming is a meandering ever changing path to enlightenment of Witch self. Therefore, Witch becomings are exponential. The concepts of unbecoming and difference will be explored in more detail within the data analysis chapters later in this thesis.

So far, this chapter has focused on mediatisation of religion, digital religion and the constructs of identities. The following section will explore how physical and digital spaces are used and conceptualised in order to contextualise how social networking spaces enable becomings.

3.6 The Place of Space

Place and space are usually considered within the paradigm of geography and have been explored through concepts such as human or cultural geography (Holloway and Hubbard, 2014; Duncan and Ley, 2013); architectural geography (Nasar, 1992) or

anthropology because they are viewed as "basic components of the lived world" (Tuan, 1977: 3). Yet place and space can also be conceptualised as concepts that are useful for analysis within behavioural, psychological and social sciences, making interesting foci for this thesis because they can be explored in more ways than identifying, describing or analysing physical locations.

Admittedly dated but still relevant and cited in many texts today, Yi-Fu Tuan's book *Space and Place* explores 'space' as both a cerebral and physical concept and suggests that there is more than one approach to understanding what space is and how it is created. Tuan notes that it is a natural human instinct to want to make sense of the world around us. Connecting with the ideas of psychologists such as Piaget he considers the development of a child and how their manipulation of the environment they are in (i.e. place) enables them to have a sense of 'space', which he calls a "schema on space" (1977: 36). He argues that to understand a physical place, an individual will need to play within the various spaces housed in it, for example on top of chairs, under tables and behind curtains. Furthermore, Tuan suggests that experience is an essential element of understanding how one interprets space and place. How a person interacts with their environment enables them to understand what space means to them personally.

Often, space and place are interdependent terms for understanding a definition (Tuan, 1977: 6) yet space is a more abstract term. Fundamentally, Tuan suggests that place is "enclosed and humanised" (1977: 34) and space is an abstract notion, however human beings need both to make sense of and personalise their worlds. "People of different cultures differ in how they divide their world, assign values to its parts, and

measure them" (Tuan, 1977: 34) thus a person's identity and their attachments to a place can affect their understanding of the physical location and in turn themselves. Additionally, value judgements and personal attitudes can affect an individual's awareness of place and this can affect how they navigate the spaces within it. Place is a locality, which could be an armchair and the Internet, yet "space is an intellectual construct [and]... a response of feeling and imagination to fundamental human needs" (Tuan, 1977: 99). Space is not a synonym of place. Space is an assemblage of ideas and a non-stratified area that is open to interpretation. This is another example of a rhizome.

Not every person will have the same relationship with space, but the place is essentially identical. This is a useful idea because the phenomenon of the Internet is the same for everyone, but how the social spaces within the Internet are navigated and what learning is taken from the experience of the space is unique to that individual. The place of a web platform such as Twitter, Instagram or Facebook is a "pause in movement" (Tuan, 1977: 138) whereas the various spaces on that page i.e. a chat room, information section or video link, is open to interpretation and hence meaning can be situated upon it or created from it (Tuan, 1977: 54). Therefore, a person who affiliates with the term Witch can confirm who they see themselves to be from the exploration of the visual and written discourses within the online spaces or/and create Witch from the online places/platforms they visit.

Massey has explored the concept of space and time since the 1990s and investigates power, gender, postmodernism and the relationships between space, time and place (See for example Massey 1991; 1992; 1996). In a more recent text, she suggests that

there has been an assumption, placed by scholars, about the concept of space so that it is mainly considered to be distance and argues that there is a problem with seeing space in this striated way (Massey, 2005). She reasons that 'time' and 'space' are usually grouped together (2005: 94) yet suggests that they are not dependent on each other in a postmodern world hence should be theorised separately i.e. scholars should stop exploring the dependent nature of time and space and consider them as multiplicities (2005: 91).

Massey observes that the concept of time is being reduced; it is still about distance but that it has limitations. Yet space she argues, includes social interactions and relationships that are not time bound, thus space is being expanded and not reduced. Conversely Bauman (2000: 176) argues that space is being annihilated because of modernity, and that time and space have become one entity. On the other hand, Massey maintains that time and space are subtly different. Space offers opportunity to explore the "patternings of uniqueness" (Massey, 2005: 91) in places with unlimited time frames such as the Internet. Seeing time, space and place as multiplicities therefore enables the opportunity to open personal ontologies and epistemologies.

It is interesting to see how Massey compares cyberspace with "material spatiality" (i.e. physical geography of space) and suggests that the way users physically use the online social spaces can potentially limit opportunities. Users decide the people and sites they follow and in addition choose who become 'friends' hence create "non-contagious communities" of similar minded people (2005: 95). Chance meetings may be lost because of the way the user has created the geography of the space within the

social networking place. The space becomes a gated community and striated, hence is a place to meet rather than a space to learn. Yet, the place of the Internet is exponential and so frequently changes. It is possible to argue therefore, that social media platforms are plateaus for rhizomatic spaces and hence may not necessarily be gated or closed but possibly be in a "state of flux" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 7), and are open to multiplicities of new experiences, connections and relationships. Even if the user chooses to only be influenced by similar mindsets to themselves, the networking space offers opportunities of the other. Hence the user may use Twitter or Instagram for example, as a place to share similar ideas in a networked striated way, but also may have the opportunity to explore links within posts so that their ideas have the potential to explore various online social spaces and develop ideas in a non-striated way.

Space is a concept that evolves with experiences and emotions. It is imagined, but to understand what it is and its relationship to place, it is helpful to explore how space is "stories-so-far", and place is "collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometrics of space" (Massey, 2005: 130). Place therefore is affected by what humans bring into it. Hence a shift needs to happen to enable scholars to see space as a physical place but also as an imagined and experienced concept. There needs to be a consideration of place, as "spatio-temporal events" (Massey, 2005: 130) that form from the integrations between space and time.

Using Massey and Tuan's work, cyberspace therefore can possibly be viewed as a physical place and an imagined space. Considering cyberspace as a plateau for rhizomatic behaviours due to the territorialisation and de-territorialisation of the

environment by its users, is a useful consideration (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013). This is because the structure of the online environment (place) encourages people to emotionally and physically connect, but it is also the online spaces where an individual is present and able to play with identities. It is for this reason therefore, that at times I use the term social networking spaces rather than sites. Social networking site implies a temporality where a user will visit an online place and leave. Social networking space however is where a user creates attachments and resides. It is inhabited, and a user has a sense of belonging. The belonging enables the becoming.

3.6.1 The Concept of a Sacred Space

It is interesting to consider whether social networking spaces and websites are sacred spaces. If it is agreed that the concept of space is related to attachment and meaning, then understanding what a sacred space is makes interesting analysis. A place of worship or physical locality for religious ritual and expression are often described using conceptual language such as ‘space’ and ‘sacred’. It is easy to assume therefore that sacred space is a place for religious observance, yet there is a value put on the concept because it implies a ‘place’, be that imaginary or physical, that is both religious and non-religious.

The term sacred has many definitions. Since Eliade (1987) and Durkheim (2008) there has been a large body of literature that has developed the epistemology of the sacred. During the 1930s, the College de Sociologie discussed the sociology of the sacred and noted that people were not moving away from the sacred as was

suggested at the time, but more towards it (Hedjuk, 2010: 279). Callois[46] added to Durkheim's analysis of how society created collective understandings of the sacred and made clearer differentiations between the sacred and the profane. Since then it has been generally accepted that there are two dichotomies of exploring the sacred; Eliade's hierophany where sacred is something that is religious and "qualitatively different" from the ordinary (1987: 26), compared to Durkheim's view of it being a social phenomenon.

Jefferey Alexander's (2003) leans more toward a Durkheimian approach to the sacred. He suggests that most of life is mundane through everyday routines, yet on occasion something may happen that makes people rethink routine and societal values. Therefore, the sacred can be evident within the mundane characteristics of society (Lynch and Sheldon, 2013: 262) and "the sacred/profane binary [is] intrinsic to social construction of the public" (ibid: 255). Lynch et al (2013) suggest that moral and cultural understandings are central to everyday practices, hence sacred is a natural part of culture. The term social sacred therefore has become a useful idiom when exploring the various forms of the sacred (Hedjuk, 2010: 279). This consideration of the mundane and social sacred shows that everyday routines be sacred because of the collective significance society may place on an event, hence demonstrating that there are "underlying sacral structures even in and out of mundane life" (Lynch and Sheldon, 2013: 262).

Furthermore, Knott et al (2013) blends profane and sacred. Similar to Turkle's evocative objects (2011) she notes that some non-religious occasions such as

[46] Roger Callois was a student of Durkheim and part of the College de Sociologie

weddings, or objects such as jewellery can be considered equally secular and sacred. She claims that what is considered sacred for an individual or a community is socially constructed, has cultural meaning and the event or object itself is slightly set apart from the ordinary, hence can be considered as sacred. Knott et al therefore not only explores the social sacred but the "secular sacred" too (Knott et al, 2013: 5). A sacred space therefore could be a physical or conceptualised religious space that has social and/or personal meaning attached to it. Yet sacred spaces can also be a physical place where ordinary events gain significance for individuals and/or community groups. Social networking spaces therefore may be sacred spaces for some individuals and groups hence meaningful religious and spiritual expression can happen within them.

3.6.2 Pagan Sacred Spaces

Often Pagan sacred sites are recognised by a group of stones or wood, which are set in a circle (henge) and such places have been used for specific pagan rituals, festivals (Sabbats) or events such as handfastings (Pagan wedding). For instance, *Stonehenge* in Wiltshire and *The Hill of Tara* or *Newgrange* in Ireland are considered by the general population to be historically important but also socially sacred to the Pagan community (Hejuk, 2010) and so some Sabbats are celebrated at them. However, a designated pagan sacred space that is used as a place for worship seems not to be readily available or publicly recognised in most villages and towns of the UK. Unlike the Nordic Government of Iceland, which agreed the building of its first Pagan temple in March 2015 (McMahon, 2015) the UK Government, at the time of writing this thesis, has not provided an agreed and established space that is purely for pagan

rites of passage. Glastonbury and Wells in Somerset boast a 'Goddess Temple' that is purely for pagan devotion but in the main, most towns and cities do not host a pagan sacred space, but most do have a Christian church or chapel (Hutton, 2018).

Summer Solstice (21st June) sees many pagan gatherings in places that have some significance, but the other seven Sabbats are also celebrated around the UK in localities that may not be usually accredited as sacred sites. For example, Beltane is celebrated by a large gathering with festival music and dance on Carlton Hill in Edinburgh (Beltane Fire Society, 2015) and Samhain for the autumn equinox on Pendle Hill in Lancashire. It seems that in the 21st century mass gatherings that celebrate pagan, Druid or Wiccan belief systems seem to be accepted by the media and general population in the same way that the Indian festival of Holi is considered in the West, i.e. they are a multi-cultural celebration rather than a religious practice. However, they are still not necessarily recognised as having enough import to be given a recognised offline sacred space purely for pagan practice. Conversely, having a public building, may not be important to a witch because they can cast a sacred circle anywhere hence can practice their Craft within any space (online or offline) that is of significance to them individually and/or collectively.

A sacred space can be anywhere because its sacrality is connected to the intent of the witch. If a witch believes a space to be sacred, then it is. The space will be physically manifested in the form of a circle for instance but also imagined as a sacred space. Some pagan groups have therefore claimed cyberspace as a space to learn about and practise Witchcraft (Berger an Ezzy, 2007; Cowan, 2005). Some online spaces are dedicated to pagan ritual, and meaning is attached to the interactions and rituals that

happen within it (Helland, 2013). Fernback's research noted that Neo-Pagans who performed ritual in real-time gained a sense of religious legitimacy and a "greater sacred salience for users than do the discussion groups" (2002: 266). She noted that individuals "attain[ed] some level of religiosity through this technological ritual practice" (2002: 267). Therefore, witches are moving some practices and rituals online possibly because there are few offline places. The witch is nomadic but claims cyberspace as a place for sacred ritual. The online space becomes a third space for spiritual interactions and provides a sense of belonging.

The concepts of space and nomad as physical rather than conceptually linked to identity, is the focus of O'Brien's paper and she defines the "third space" (the space that is not home or work) as "techno-space" (2012: 4). She uses the term 'digital nomad' to describe people who may have a need to use technology on mobile devices but do this in places that do not belong to them in a traditional sense, i.e. a work's office or home. O'Brien's concept of digital nomad is useful for this thesis because she claims the "techno-spaces continually evolve with communication and behavioural patterns and rituals, being constantly redefined and renegotiated" (2012: 4). Although she does not explore becoming, she is using some of Deleuze and Guattari's theory and language to explain behaviours related to networking and the use of space.

3.6.3 Cyber Spaces and Cyber Places

The term cyberspace originated from the short story by William Gibson *Burning Chrome* (1982) and novel *Necromancer* (1984) and was used to describe an

imagined or hallucinated experience within digital worlds. It has now been widely used to explain the Internet. Thus, with this understanding, the Internet is an imagined world experience but researchers in the field of religion, media and culture would argue that the Internet is not only an imagined experience but also a hybrid of physical and cerebral (Bunt, 2002; Karaflogka, 2006). Being online provides an opportunity to explore what it means to be human, therefore the definition of cyberspace needs to be considered as more than a place to visit.

There are many uses of the prefix 'cyber' to explain aspects of digital or online behaviour and activity, for example cyber-coven (Klassen, 2002) cyber-punk (Leary, 1988) cyber-netics (Ashby, 1961) cyborg (Klassen, 2005), cyber-sex (Waskul, 2003) cyber-man (Dr Who TV series The Tenth Planet, 1966). This would suggest therefore that there seems to be an agreed understanding that cyber means digital, however the suffix is interchangeable. There is not one agreed notion of what space means. Henge is a word that has a meaning related to a physical circular place/space such as *Stonehenge* in Wiltshire, England and so this has been attributed to online digital Paganisms. Henge however implies a physical place rather than a conceptual space. There are idioms such as 'virtual-world', 'online' or 'networking' which suggest a physical element to the digital place, but they too do not necessarily provide agreement or have the same conceptual meaning as space. Space is not often (if at all) replaced by or merged with synonyms such as place or world and so has multiple meanings.

For the purposes of this thesis therefore, it is helpful to think of cyberspace as an amalgam of Massey's imagined space and Tuan's physical space. Websites,

chatrooms and virtual worlds encourage people to create digital plateaus so that they can share and communicate ideas. The cyber spaces are experienced in an imagined social way, for example through speech acts. In addition, they are experienced physically through using the senses i.e. typing, speaking or watching.

Spaces that are considered virtual-worlds such as World of Warcraft, Minecraft, Active Worlds, Second Life and online gaming are making the unreal become a situated reality, because of the emotional attachments of users within an online game or chat room and the personal information that is shared. Edringsingha, Nia, Pluciennik and Young suggest that online spaces provide a "sense of presence" so that users of the space have an experience that feels similar if not the same as an offline place (2009: 459). Castronova (2007) also notes that virtual worlds or 'synthetic worlds' are competing with the offline world but there is a mass exodus from offline onto online and eventually the experiences within both worlds will be more synchronous. Indeed Campbell (2013) and Wagner (2012) note how it is a natural phenomenon to blend online behaviours with offline for example tweeting at the same time as watching a TV programme. Hence, cyberspace, techno-space, digital-space is a conceptually and physically experienced digital environment, where users can engage with emotions synchronous to being offline.

Online environments therefore are the third space that is inhabited by humans and which, "grows out of various 'as ifs' generated by diverse practitioners and audiences who flexibly engage in actions within this new space that they inhabit" (Hoover, 2013: 267). Hoover argues that the spaces are self-created and subjective,

based on an individual's aspirations. Moreover, the online spaces for example Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram "are not a large public sphere, but small sphericals of action and practice that operate as their own spaces" (Hoover, 2013: 268).

3.6.4 Social Networking Spaces

Social networking spaces such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, TicTok, YouTube, Second Life, generic electronic or video blogging sites and chat rooms are often analysed by academics. Studies relate to a variety of social phenomena and are explored within a selection of theoretical lenses. Some examples are identity (Marwick and Boyd, 2010) learning (Carpenter and Kraka, 2014) ethics (Vallor, 2010) religion (Baesler and Chen, 2012; Miller, Mundey and Hill, 2013) and commerce (Kietzmann, Jermkien, McCarthy and Silverstre, 2011; Kaplan and Maernlein 2009). Yet these authors, and others, use the term 'social networking sites' within their papers and there seems to be an assumption that there is an agreed understanding of what social networking sites are, what they do and how they are used.

Authors such as Carpenter et al (2014: 3) and Kietzmann et al (2011: 241) include definitions for social networking sites that suggest they are different from websites because they are a platform for people to create and share content that is exponential. Marwick et al (2010) suggest that social networking sites such as Twitter are micro-blogs and like Carpenter and Kietzmann see them as digital locations; sites to explore rather than emotionally invested spaces. The term 'site' suggests that interactions are

traced onto a place and not necessary permanently embedded or etched within it. Seeing social media in this way could potentially limit Rhizome Theory and Rhizome-Mycelium Theory because a social networking 'site' could be a plateau that encourages rhizomatic behaviours but does not necessarily create or foster them. A social networking 'space' such as Instagram or YouTube however could be both a plateau (as described above) and a rhizome because the users interact within the space through responding to posts and changing content and opinions; the dialogue and interaction with the content within the space helps to form new ideas and create new truths. Thus, it is helpful to consider social networking as third spaces that people inhabit, in order to create personal epistemologies rather than remote imaginary places to visit.

All social networking spaces contain an element of images and writing but can be categorised into three groups. They are textual, visual and virtual. The media related to social spaces such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter are textual and although images are encouraged and used, they do not dominate the content. The written postings are the most important element to the user. Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest however are dominated by images or video and although written motifs are included, it is the collection of the images and video that tell the story of the user. Such spaces become significant to the users who post, also to those who re-post, respond to and interact with the content (Baesler et al, 2013).

The infrastructure of the social networking space therefore encourages personal, meaningful and significant expressions and interactions (Hoover, 2013). Similarly, virtual world media such as Second Life, Active Worlds and World of Warcraft

encourage interactions through multi-modal methods that are visual, textual, video, voice and animation. They aim to develop an online presence through creating individual personas (avatars) so that users of the media feel connected to the fate of their online identity, even if it is unlike their offline one (Lombard and Ditton, 1997; Edringsingha et al, 2010; Winder, 2008). Such personal, emotional connections ensure that the online space is not simply a location to visit but is a space to become whatever and whoever they wish to be.

Marwick and Boyd (2011) explored identities and interactions within the social networking space Twitter and noticed that although the platform suggested infinite possibilities of connecting people, the interactions were bounded because users had an "imagined audience" (2010: 115). Thus, on most occasions, people self-censored content because of their culture, lifestyle, attitudes and offline identities. Social networking spaces therefore are not as limitless as one might think and, as Massey (2005) also noted previously in this chapter, online users tend to interact with similar minded groups. Lange (2008) and Boyd (2007) suggest that people self-censor because the users of YouTube, Facebook and Twitter negotiate between publicly private or privately public postings depending on who, what and why they wish to share information and ideas with, and this negotiation can enable group membership. This is interesting for the focus of this study because it seems that social networking spaces do encourage networked rhizomatic behaviours but possibly within a self-stratified environment even though social networking sites are generally considered to be non-stratified spaces.

It seems therefore that to understand and analyse behaviours within a social networking space it is important to be aware of the purpose of the online platform. Ketzmann et al (2011: 243) designed a honeycomb model that explored the function of the social networking spaces Facebook, Lindkin, YouTube and Foursquare. They noted how people interacted within the spaces. They suggested that the data was useful for helping businesses understand how they can target specific demographics (Figure 1). The researchers traced how the social networking spaces encouraged certain types of behaviour, i.e. encouraged interactions that were about sharing knowledge compared to creating groups or conducting conversations. The four identified social networking spaces were platforms for sharing and creating knowledge, but the researchers did not necessarily explore why people interacted with the space and how they created the social connections and networks.

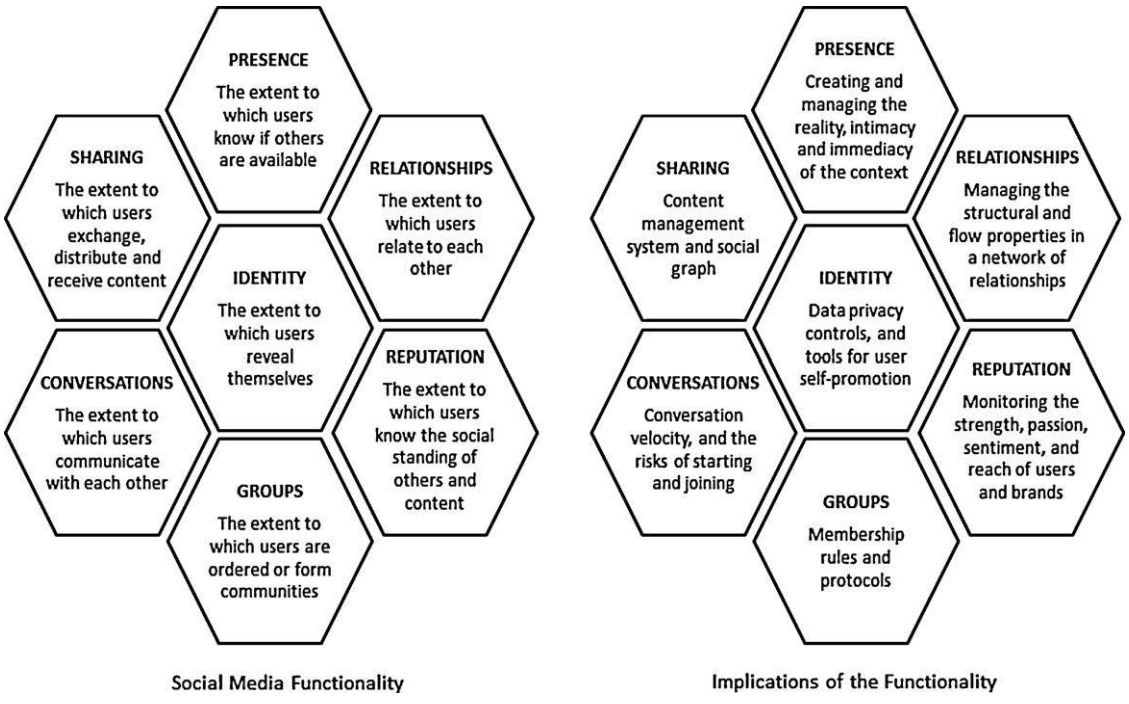


Figure 1: Kieztmann et al's (2011: 243) Honeycomb Model of interactions within social networking spaces

The honeycomb model's rubric suggests that users share identities but also limit what they share in relation to why they are online. Kieztmann et al's research is

interesting because the findings suggest that networks were about connections, yet the model does not necessarily go far enough in exploring how those themed networks created new themes, new networks and new knowledge.

Witches in my study have explored social networking spaces and engaged in conversations and relationships. Some of the themes noted in Kieztmann et al's model have been observed in the data within my study. However, the data analysis chapters in this thesis (chapters four, five and six), further extend Kiezmann et al's categories and explore how the conversations, relationships and sharing demonstrate the construction and confirmation of Witch identities.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has explored how religion is presented in digital media and is part of the everyday (Campbell, 2013). Mediatisation of religion has included Witch discourses that have reflected societal attitudes towards age (Swift et al, 2017), the concept of Woman (Henneberg, 2010) and religion in general (Hjarvaard, 2007). Witch has been presented within frameworks that are gendered, sexualised, age-related and feminist i.e. man, woman, child, evil hag, menopausal woman, selfless godmother, sexually confident, sexually aware, sexually deviant and self-empowered (Ezzy, 2003; Pearson, 2010). Such multiple identities are evidence of how Witch emboldens the multiphrenic self (Gergen, 1991: 76) and enables a polyphonic bricolage (Schmidt, 2003: 10) of identity construction because there is not one set Witch identity. To do this, a witch needs a playful attitude and so online platforms are set up to encourage identity play (Herminia, 2010; Oliver and Carr, 2009) and it is

through play that one gains the confidence to identify with their authentic selves (Cable et al, 2013).

The issues with digital identity play however are that individuals tend to interact with similar minded people (Massey, 2005) hence may not necessarily expand their consciousness and truly challenge the status quo. Play is therefore limited. However, the anonymous nature of the Internet may enable a witch to express their true nature. Establishing an individualised identity, may be easier online due to the limited offline spaces available for pagans who wish to practise their craft (Cowan, 2005). Furthermore, the digital spaces and anonymity can enable a more honest exchange with strangers (Bargh et al, 2002) although the relationships can be criticised as being weak (Cowan, 2005).

Moreover, to establish themselves and become Witch, individuals will need to unbecome their former self (Grosz, 2005). Witch identities therefore will change and become liquid so that individuals may not necessarily always have the same identity (Fachin et al, 2015). Individuals are likely to explore various names as markers of who they are, and want to be, alongside imagining who they can become (Levitt et al, 2006). Identity construction therefore is personal and performed within the online spaces. For that reason, cyber-spaces have more significance than cyber-places. A cyberspace is inhabited. Individuals share their lives within them: sharing personal emotions and events (Massey, 2005). Hence social networking spaces are potentially places that enable Witch to imagine who they want to be rather than who they are.

Finally, the literature in this chapter notes that Witch is established through interactions with the themes of popular culture, identity play, reclaiming the concept of Witch, authentic self and the use of digital space for identity construction. This thesis therefore explores the use of "technologies to live out the spiritual" (Hoover, 2013: 268) and so the next four chapters will analyse and discuss such spiritualities through exploring how Witch is established and re-established through social networking spaces.

Chapter Four: Naming Witch

"It's not Wizard or Warlock, it's just Witch" (David)

"I'm a different kind of Wiccan" (Jenny)

"Obviously I'm a witch because I'm doing Witchcraft… So, I guess I am a witch!" (Mike)

As has already been established in this thesis, Western society has an essentialist identity model of a witch that stipulates her to be ugly, do magic and have a green face.[47] Yet such a hegemonic view is being challenged through the sharing of multi-media within social networking spaces such as YouTube and Instagram that offer a wider selection of Witch identities in addition to the hag stereotype. Witch identities presented within social media are fluid, individualistic and self-created. The postings advocate an open attitude to Witch identity formation and demonstrate that there are multiple Witch identities.

This chapter is the first of three data analysis chapters, and within it I explore some of the discourses about the terms Witch and Witchcraft within social media posts. I consider how a person's Witch identity is influenced by online interactions with images, discussions and general information. Along with the responses from the 13 Life History Narrative interviews (see Appendix one), I analyse how people create and confirm their Witch identities through interactions with others, and how they self-proclaim as Witch. This chapter is titled Naming Witch because it explores the

[47] Before the film Wizard of Oz in 1939 witches did not have green faces. This became an established physical characteristic after the film was released (Gibson, 2018)

various markers a person uses to establish their Witch identity. Such markers are the name they choose, the authority they accept and the practice they undertake.

To understand why and how Witch is portrayed within social networking spaces, it is important to consider the images that are offered within search engines. 'Witch' in Google.co.uk and Google Images throws a selection of stereotypical images of a witch, for example a conical hat, green face, flying broom stick, pointed nose, black cat as is depicted in the screenshot image 1. The images within the Google search, suggests that the ageist stereotype identified by Callister et al (2007) is prevalent. It also demonstrates that it is the algorithmic authority (Campbell, 2018: 28) that establishes what it means to be Witch. Campbell (2018) explores how memes, that are linked to religious images, affect society's attitude towards religions. Images that go viral enable the messages within them to influence people. Shirky (2009) and Campbell (2018) note that the computational systems of codes and algorithms that measure the likes, shares and tweets related to an image, give status to its content and this enables its spread. Therefore, a search engine result can be evidence towards understanding society's established position of what a witch is.

Furthering the search parameters to include 'identity', Google search engines offer a broader spectrum than the stereotypical image of the evil hag, and present Witch as queer, feminist, nature loving, old, young, evil or kind (as is evident in image 2). Similarly, the outcome of the search within Pinterest (image 3) and YouTube (image 4) incorporate spells, information about ritual, Witchcraft, use of herbs for magic and

crystals. The search results therefore suggest that Witch identity is not only related to the aesthetics of Witch, but is also linked to ritual, objects, belief and praxis.

The Life History Narrative interviews with David and Mike highlighted a similar theme. They felt that their Witch identity was confirmed not only by what they wore (or did not wear) and how they looked, but also by what they did with regards to ritual and The Craft.

"I can wear my Wiccan hat and I can wear my Druid hat, I know that in many ways that I am saying the same things and doing the same practice, just with slightly different words…that is what Witchcraft is to me" (Mike)

"Been a nudist all my life and with Wicca it's a way of breaking barriers down…It's what you are, not what you dress or have" (David)

Broadening search criteria in social media platforms to include 'Witch identities' and/or Witch signifiers such as a cat, broom, cauldron, spells; results suggest that a witch's identity blended visual discourses and performance with personal belief systems and popular culture (as is exemplified in image 5). Search engines classified Witch with images that included posts about the occult, supernatural beings, the afterlife, political movements, Witchcraft, feminism, nature and Witch heritage. Moreover, some search engines such as Pinterest, included links to specific styles of clothing, food recipes, merchandise, films, TV, popular culture and Witch memes. Yet not every self-identified online witch acknowledged all categories as part of their Witch identity. From exploring sites through the methodology of Netnography, (see chapter two), I discovered that self-identified online witches would connect to a few of the categories listed above but rarely all. A digital witch therefore may be a

feminist witch and interested in merchandise for ritual but not necessarily be interested in heritage.

The assortment of Witch identities that are exemplified in search engines, demonstrate that there is not one typology of Witch (although the stereotype of the hag witch is still prevalent). Therefore, a witch's identity is a blend of the individual's belief system and personality type. A witch will become Witch through gathering information that is of personal interest to them and assimilating it with their existing ideas. This was mirrored in the Life History Narrative interviews. The witches noted that they blended personal belief about angels or culture with their Witchcraft and understanding of Witch self.

"I wanted to make it a bit bespoke I suppose, to me and my beliefs, so it made sense" (Sienna)

"I like a lot of Native American beliefs. I have a lot of them intertwined. I have a real affinity for trees" (Grace)

"I love the idea of guardian angels and we always say someone's looking over your shoulder" (Kelly)

The online montages created and categorised by search engines demonstrate that Witch identities are eclectic and fluid and that there is not a striated Witch identity. An individual may take their own meaning and interest from an eclectic mix that is offered within social networking spaces to create a Witch identity, or to confirm their existing witch self.

Although the algorithms within an electronic search engine create the montage, the results page can still be an example of polyphonic bricolage[48] (Schmidt, 2003: 10) because it presents more than one identity. The Life History Narrative witches noted that they used the Internet and search engines to discover various Witch behaviours as is demonstrated in the following comments.

"I guess it's good to teach people the set ways and then you can do it however you see fit I suppose" (Holly)

"When the Internet happened, it was open season. You found out loads of things. You found out about the Salem witches, spells, black magic and it just opened all the doors" (Penny)

"I found one [a Pagan website] that I use to use all the time. It's like a step by step how to do it: There's loads" (Kelly)

"Pinterest is good especially for ideas for Hallowe'en altars. Sometimes it's nice to see how other people have got them set up because you can think oh, I didn't even think of that" (Kelly)

The engagement with the online content enabled the Life History Narrative witches to create their multiphrenic Witch self (Gergen 1991: 76).[49] The Life History

[48] Polyphonic bricolage is explained in chapter three. Identity is created through a selection of identities for example a mother, father, teacher, student, gardener and together they become a bricolage of who a person is. Ideas, discourses and experiences are blended together to form a tapestry of the self.

[49] Multiphrenic Self is explained in chapter three and is a term that is given to identities that are created through a selection of socially constructed roles and values. The identity relates to the social construct and situation for example a witch may be dressed as a hag at Hallowe'en, skyclad (see glossary) during Beltane and meditative when conducting solitary Witchcraft at a personal altar. Each identity contributes to the witch self, yet each identity is affected by the social situation and/or the expectations of the event.

Narrative witches explored online content and assimilated ideas into their existing mindset and practice. The collection of ideas helped them form a sense of the witch they wanted to become, and the witch they currently saw themselves.

The following sections in this chapter, explore the data from a selection of social networking spaces along with the Life History Narrative interviews. The themes have been classified under the following areas: names, authentic self, the concept of Woman, and the occult.

4.1 Self -Identification of Names

When profiles are created, social networking sites require identification markers known as handles in the form of a label or name hence choosing a name is often a reflection of self-concept (Hagstrom, 2008). It is interesting for this study therefore to see how people have used and played with the term Witch within their online public profiles, how they have explored Witch identity and whether they self-identify as a witch. Instagram, Twitter and Facebook have a selection of self-identified witches who include the term Witch in their hybridised handle. The handle and online profile confirm the witch they see themselves to be and subsequently demonstrates what they feel they are not (i.e. they are not the stereotypical hag). A person will start an online Witch journey through actively choosing their online profile and handle. Their choice required reflection on who they feel they are and who they want to become.

The examples below demonstrate that a witch can have multiple identities and still be a witch. Many public handles within social media represent Witch in the following ways.

- thepunkwitch25 (Instagram) suggests an alternative lifestyle to the norm
- thewitchoftheforest (Instagram) suggests a nature based faith
- conjurings_of_a_witch (Instagram) suggests a focus on magic
- wake_the_witches (Instagram) a feminist approach to Witch
- @TheSmartWitch (Facebook) depicted in image 6 suggests a knowledgeable witch
- The White Witch (Twitter) possibly an emphasis on the discourses related to white/good versus dark/evil hence people like to associate themselves more with good than ill[50]
- The Hedge Witch (Twitter) suggests a nature-based witch
- Wise Witches Walking with the Goddess (Facebook) suggests a goddess- based feminist faith

What is more, the names people use for their handle can show a person's belief system, praxis or heritage and can represent the other identities that make up their sense of self such as their gender or sexuality. Many examples present a multiphrenic[51] identity. Image 7 blends the Jewish faith tradition with sexuality (Goddess Born. August 2018. The Gay Jewish Witch).

[50] See Ezzy's (2006) article *White Witches and Black magic: ethics and consumerism in contemporary Witchcraft* (in bibliography) to explore the themes of white and black Witchcraft and what they are assumed to mean

[51] Multiphrenic self is explained in Chapter Three and is a term that is given to identities that are created through a selection of socially constructed roles and values. The identity relates to the social construct and situation for example a witch may be dressed as a hag at Hallowe'en, skyclad (see glossary) during Beltane and meditative when conducting solitary Witchcraft at a personal altar. Each identity contributes to the Witch self yet each identity is affected by the social situation and/or the expectations of the event.

Evidence of multiphrenic witch identities are also in the following examples:

- Kitchen witch (image 8)
- Earth-witch (image 9)
- The Pendle witch (image 10)
- Queer atheist witch (image 11 and blog image 12)

Online profiles are a presentation of self-concept and a promotion of the persona the individual wants others to see. It is a form of branding and self- promotion (Garcia-Rapp, 2017) so that the profile looks eclectic and random but is in fact, carefully constructed. As Greenough (2017: 10) argues,

> "identities formulated through online platforms are carefully considered and constructed before they are published in the form of a profile […] The internet therefore provides a tool in which biographies are created, yet these are dynamic self-narratives that are constantly updated"

and Stern suggests that "one does not exist in cyberspace until one literally writes oneself into existence" (2003: 256). Therefore, online Witch identities are created using specific discourses that are a hybrid of challenging stereotypes and religious expression with individualised interpretations of what it means to be Witch.

The use of a label or name was also acknowledged in the Life History Narrative interviews. Self-chosen labels were related to praxis and personal belief systems. Ellie and Penny included spiritual aspects to their Witch identity (Atheist, Buddhist, Spiritual) and played with these identities, which Fachin and Davel (2015) suggest is a natural process when exploring self-concept.

"Buddhist Witch…You can be a Buddhist witch, maybe you're none of those things, because you can be an atheist and still dabble in it" (Ellie)

"White witch really more than anything; Spiritual; alter-nature. That's about it really. What I title myself... I am more spiritual than a witch" (Penny)

Indeed, Sienna notes that she is "becoming a witch or green witch" due to the experimentation she has undergone with a selection of Pagan traditions and practices. Likewise, Mike used a selection of names and labels to self-identify his becoming Witch. He played with different names throughout his narrative because his experiences and encounters with others affected his thinking and therefore his Witch identity. The terminology he chooses, demonstrates an amalgam or bricolage (Schmidt, 2003) of identities that are fluid (Filiciak, 2003). Mike's Witch identity was a blend of his learning journey as a Druid and Wiccan; his gypsy Diddykai[52] heritage; his shamanistic and vegan ethics; his gender identity and his personal praxis. His identity has frequently been in a state of flux as is exemplified by the titles in bold from his narrative.

'In 2009 I took my 1st degree in **Alexandrian Wicca**"

"I was an **animist** with wiggle room"

"I'm a **male witch**…I am not **a warlock**, no that's a traitor and what am I a traitor against?"

"I've been called by my ex-wife's teacher a **sorcerer** which is a term for a bad shaman! And because my ethics has a little more wiggle room than his, something bothers me on a spiritual plane, I take it out or edit it. So, my ethics are a little grey."

[52] Mike used Diddykai to describe his heritage, although some witches can find this to be an offensive term

"In my mind being **a witch** was doing what already happened but stronger. So, working with herbs...working with energies... working with spirits."

"So, someone asked me what do you do to identify yourself with and I say well I could call myself **a witch**, some of my practice is quite **shamanistic** and how I do it at the time. Some of it was traditional Witchcraft and shamanism. They cross over borders an awful lot" (Mike)

It is the merging of Mike's praxis with past experiences that have enabled him to be Witch, however because he is always becoming, it is likely that his Witch identity will continue to be fluid and change by the time of this thesis' publication. Such a tapestry of identities exemplify that Witch identity is created through multiple roles that are socially constructed (Gergen, 1991: 76) and a liquid modern[53] approach to self-concept (Bauman, 2007) as Penny suggests, "anyone can be anything".

Creating an identity by blending experiences seems not to be unusual. Other Life History Narrative participants noted that what they did as a witch, i.e. their praxis, helped form a witch identity. Jenny said, "I was a Hedge Witch which is a solitary tradition, so it was a lot of herbs like a lot of my own spells", and Sienna suggested that "to be able to label yourself as a Green Witch you'd need to know more". Defining oneself through blending self-identified labels with practice is also evident online especially within Instagram and Twitter where many people include extra details on their home page to give a wider profile than their chosen name or handle. For example, @skylee_sulivan in image 13, includes runes within her Twitter handle

[53] Liquid modernity is explained in chapter three. Bauman suggests that in the postmodern 21st Century a person can change behaviours, identities, ideas to suit different situations hence modernity is not static. Liquid modernity means therefore that there is not a set trajectory to development. Development is fluid and so will not develop in an obvious set way.

and self-identifies with heathen and Norse, whereas @Wicca_BluMoon in image 14 self identifies with teaching, the goddess and spell craft.

Indeed, my own Twitter handle - the digital witchdoctor (image 15) - is also a reflection of this finding and is related to my research about social media, witches and my wish to be successful in gaining my PhD hence I play with the words digital, witch and doctor. I have also posted a tweet that associates the image of my mother, daughter and myself as Maiden, Mother and Crone thus highlighting how my witch identity is not only related to what I do, but what I believe and what I am interested in.

The witches above have mixed identities that create their own personal Witch self-concept. The identities are manifested through the choice of terminology that describes who they believe themselves to be. Yet what is more interesting to consider is why it was necessary to qualify Witch. Including details such as White witch, Green witch, Druid witch, Wiccan witch, Eclectic witch suggests that the emphasis on the adjective that describes Witch is essentially more important than simply being a witch. It seems that individuals have created a witch identity that is personally unique to them and to their experiences. They have created an identity that is outwith the faith tradition, meaning they belong with a larger group of people named Pagans but have also opted to be out of this group. In order not to lose their individualism and sense of personal identity they create a personalised craft and Witch name. Bauman explores mixophilia and mixophobia in his book *Liquid Times* (2007: 86-91) and suggests humans have a natural urge to mix and be part of a large crowd however, people are also naturally fearful and phobic of getting lost in the crowd and

losing a sense of self. This could be one possible explanation as to why some witches prefer to distinguish that they belong to the generic term ‘Witch’ but with that term, they have an individuality that enables them to define the aspects that relate to their personalised witch self.

Broader terms that link to branches of paganism such as Druid and Wicca are also utilised by the Life History Narrative participants. Holly, David and Jenny identified with the terms Pagan or Wicca. Additionally, within Twitter there are many examples of generic pages dedicated to Paganism and Witchcraft. Image 16 is a screenshot of a Twitter Pagan group named Witches&Pagans and image 17 is a screenshot of a Twitter search that lists a selection of groups interested in Witchcraft.

Similarly, Facebook has a wide selection of open and closed pagan groups demonstrating that the name of an online social group can attract a broad spectrum of individuals. People who may have their own personalised form of paganism but collectively connect with a common interest that is suggested in the group’s handle. The collective identity may appeal to the mindset of some individuals hence they decide to join the group and engage in discussion. The following examples (which are not exhaustive) are all Facebook groups.

- Witches in the Hut
- The Witches Cottage
- The Pagan Peddler
- Central Lancashire Pagan Moot
- The Defiant Crone
- Souls Sisters Spiritual Vibes
- Cunning Men and Wise-Women
- Uclan Pagan Society

- Witchcraft in History and the Arts
- Pan Summers–Pagan erotica
- TSD Lampeter Pagan Society
- The Garnet witches Grimoire

4.1.1 Attracting the Title of a Witch

Occasionally, the witches in the Life History Narrative interviews identified themselves through the feedback or labels they were given by others and at times, this affected their practice so that it developed into new avenues of Witchcraft or of Witch. For example, Jenny noted that "a lot of people are turning up saying I'm a Chaos Magician, so I thought I better go and find out" and Penny[54] said "Back in the 70s I was known as THE Witch". However, at times being identified as Witch was potentially problematic for some individuals:

"She has seen my reiki symbols they are quite colourful…and she said 'oh what are they? Do you even know what they are?' meaning me. 'Yeah I do actually well they're reiki!'… She turns to B and says, 'She's a witch, did you know she's a witch!" and I'm thinking you petty small-minded person. I thought don't scare him off and I had to turn to B and say, 'I'm not a witch B but just interested in different things" (Sally)

Sally's behaviour tries to conceal her identity so to not draw attention to herself. The stigma she feels that is attached to the term 'Witch' could, in her mind, negatively affect her and so she obscures the stigmatised identity. Reece (2016: 66) considers such behaviours as "passing strategies" but they can cause conflict and relationship

[54] Digital recorded interview with Penny (02.03.17) the stress on **The** is by Penny in the interview

issues. Passing strategies can also stop the individual from "integrating a sense of Self" and can lead to feelings of isolation (Reece, 2016: 67).

Hostility is an experience that some of the participants in this study have encountered from individuals because of their alternative identities and spiritualities. Such negativity caused some distress and at times caused, particularly with Sienna and Sally, reluctance to use witch as an identity marker. This was also a finding online and is shown in image 18. This blog and Instagram post notes some of the negative comments the witch has experienced.

The Life History Narrative witches had reasons for experiencing disapproving attitudes towards the term Witch or having issues with Witchcraft. They suggested it was because of the stereotype threat of witches and women (Henneberg, 2010) and the historically negative attitude associated with witches. Sally and Sienna both felt that "there's a stigma attached to witches" (Sally) and that "Witch has really bad connotations" (Sienna). Sally suggested that this was because in her understanding, most witches (including her) see spirits and work with the occult. She felt that occult was considered by non-pagans and the general population to be evil and related to devil worship. This was evident within some social networking discussions. Pagans felt the need to confirm that the occult was not necessarily about worshiping the Devil nor evil. For example, within a public Facebook group, one individual noted that

> "The term 'occult' is associated with the term 'witchcraft' and both branded frequently as evil [includes etymological definition] The term is sometimes taken to mean knowledge ...but for most practicing occultists it is simply the study of a deeper spiritual reality that extends beyond pure reason and the physical sciences. Nope, nothing sinister there! ☺"

Possibly the myth of the occult has been due to representations of witches within general media and popular culture such as within the films *The Witch* (2015) and *The Love Witch* (2017) also the Netflix series *The New Adventures of Sabrina* (2019). Lyons (2017) uses the term 'occult' interchangeably with 'Witchcraft' and suggests that popular films have had some impact in the revival of the occult so much so, a person will blend the two, which as Hjarvaard would note as an example of "banal religion" and identifies this phenomenon as "pop culture paganism" (2011: 128). Lyons (2017) does not argue that there is a popularity of occult. He does suggest however that "for many, Paganism and the occult are appealing because of their open-minded attitudes about gender and secularity" (Lyons, 2017). Some Pagans therefore have reclaimed the label Witch to empower rather than dis-empower their sense of self.

Social media posts suggest that for some, self-identifying as a witch enables them to express a personal spirituality that is non-normative, i.e. alternative to the accepted hag image of the witch. The identity label allows them to fight back against prejudice and stereotype of who to be and how to behave, as is represented in the YouTube poem that discusses labels and is image 19 (Witches Alchemy, 2014). Donovan (2015) argues that some individuals who identify as non-binary have

moved their faith from traditional religions such as Roman Catholicism or Mormonism to Paganism and Witchcraft because of a "male-female binary" and the opportunity to have a "supernatural form of self-defence" that accepts queer-trans identities as the norm (Donovan, 2015).

The meme 'we are the granddaughters of the witches you could not burn' as exemplied in the poem within the YouTube video and image 19 (Witches Alchemy, 2014) is shared throughout many social networking spaces and is often shared, commented upon, and retweeted. The word Witch seems to offer power and agency rather than disempowerment. Witchcraft uses words to create pictures and intentions and having belief in an intention creates power. Spells are usually poetic and the words that are performed hold and carry weight. Similarly to the Old Testament with the fear in the name of God (hence was written as YHWH), fearing Witch suggests it has ooccult (hidden) power. More, reclaiming and using Witch has emancipatory power. Hence for a person to actively use the word Witch as an identity label shows some insight into their faith mindset and intentions for becoming Witch.

4.1.2 Actively Choosing to have No Label

Four of the 13 witches in the Life History Narratives decided not to use labels or names because they preferred "liquid identities" (Filiciak, 2003: 93) and not be restricted to a normative ideology of self.

"I didn't want to put a label on myself" (Felicity)

"I'm not very good with labels" (Sienna)

"It took me years really to work out what I would call myself… I think labels perhaps are wrong to have because it restricts too heavily" (Tanya)

Moreover, some participants attributed the term Witch to following a specific path, i.e. Wicca or Druid, and if they were not adhering to that practice then they felt they should not use the term Witch.
"I think I use to [call myself Witch] but I find that these days I don't practice magic as much, so I move away from that label" (Holly)

"I'm not completely a Wiccan. A lot of what it says does makes sense, so I generally say Oh Wiccan because some understand that better" (Grace)

Furthermore, some witches associated the term Witch with a faith tradition and wanted to disassociate with any form of organised religion; "I don't say that I'm anything… I'm not tied to paganism" (Lexie) and this is also reflected in the online postings of individuals. The non-conformist attitude to faith and spiritualities is a common thread within Witch identities especially when linked to Christianity. As previously noted, some witches enjoy a position of outwith (Cowan, 2006). Outwith is explored in more detail in chapter five within this thesis.

It may be useful at this point to summarise and consider the approaches used for the construction of Witch-self and explore the terms 'protean', 'boundaryless' and 'boundary' that are commonly used in career research (Arthur, 2014) but can be utilised here to explore Witch mindsets. A protean approach to identity construction relates to personal philosophies and ideologies. An individual would have a mindset to actively seek out experiences and encounters that are connected in some way to their personal belief systems. For example, someone who is becoming Witch and felt

they had an affinity with the earth and wanted to protect it, may actively follow a person on Twitter or Instagram who is a Green Witch, green-activist or herbalist. Their Witch identity would be constructed through connecting with groups they affiliate with and which confirm their own philosophies or adds to them (Massey, 2005). For example, Tanya said,

"I've always…had an affinity with the outdoors… and I started working with plants and herbalism and everything. I've always been vegan from a young child…and none of my family were that way inclined, so they always said I was odd in a nice way" (Tanya)

A boundaryless approach to identity construction however would be a process that is accidental (Guest and Rodrigues, 2014). The individual would not necessarily have a strong philosophy and so ideas and belief systems are developed from happenstance. For example, a person may do a search on Google and then randomly select websites that direct them to an eclectic view of Witchcraft and Witch. The understandings of Witch therefore may be constructed from a wide variety of ideas that do not necessarily marry or follow a pattern. Holly is an example of having a boundaryless mindset.

"Some people will have names they use I mean for Wicca and things like that and I just haven't gone down that route at all I think particularly because I have only walked on my own" (Holly).

Finally, there is the bounded approach to identity construction where a person develops who they are because they belong to an established group that have a creed, clear structure and set belief systems. This individual is more likely to be part of a coven, be a Druid, Wiccan or Alexandrian Witch.

"I'm only first degree... I'm probably ready for my second degree... just waiting for the right time...the second take on the role and rituals... so once I've done second I'll have to do High Priestess." (Jenny)

All approaches are fluid ways of constructing identities that lead to Witch, but the interpretation of what Witch is becomes dependent on the individual's mindset and comfort or discomfort with certainties. Therefore, self-identifying as Witch and actively using the term Witch or something similar such as The Defiant Crone (a closed Facebook group) demonstrates that individuals have given the term much thought about how it indicates their sense of self and how it may be perceived by others.

4.2 Authentic Self

One of the themes identified within this study that has also been discussed in chapter three, is the sense of being authentic to one's inner self or true self (Stroeminger, 2017). The Life History Narrative witches noted that once a person chose to identify as a witch then they felt they became more authentic and actualised their true self. For example, Grace said, "I am happy as I am", and stated that Witchcraft had enabled her to be confident with her spirituality. Likewise, Ellie stated, "he's always brought me up to just be me, you know not be bothered, you know you are what you are…. either people will either like it or they won't and that's fine".

The concept of authenticity is often raised within online pagan discourses. Deciding whether a person is authentically pagan or not, according to Coco and Woodward, is mainly down to the distinction between someone who is noted as a "fluffy bunny"

and creates a hybrid of popular culture and praxis (2007: 479) and another who considers popular culture to be insincere and focuses on a more serious expression of The Craft. Yet what seems to be an appeal for many of the Life History Narrative witches and cyber-witches is the flexible nature of Witch identities. This was also recognised by one of Donovan's (2015) interviewees who acknowledged that "there is no one way to be a witch… it's a really freeing identity" (Donovan, 2015). Therefore, it seems that practice that was personally important to an individual, was authentic even if the identity was not widely accepted by the collective.

However not all who identified with alternate spiritualities or Witch with the Life History Narratives (and online) wished to fully come "out of the broom closet" (Berger, 1999: 11) but they did feel The Craft was part of them. Sally noted that although she felt that her practice made her more confident she did not tell many people; "Only my friends and people I know who are genuine do I say heh! listen I can do reiki or why don't you do a spell or cosmic ordering", and so she was only able to be her authentic self to a small group of people. Three of the Life History Narrative participants (Sienna, Kelly and Grace) felt that they did not want to publicise their Witch identity but did feel that privately accepting their personal spirituality made them feel settled and happy. It is difficult to gain full insight into why someone chooses to conceal their spiritual identity however, like Reece's research (2016: 91) many wanted to be in control of the information they shared. Yet unlike Reece's suggestion, none of the 13 Life History Narrative witches in this study chose to publicly disclose their Witch identity as a show of activism.

Hillis (2009) argues that being authentic is easier when online due to the potential to be anonymous within the platform. Mike mirrored this sentiment when he took part in online discussions with someone who identified as a 'Theistic-Satanist'. "[anonymity] allowed me to ask things – that because they were anonymous at the time and under a pseudonym, they were perfectly happy to tell you everything". However, Winder (2008) would argue that people are not their real selves online, only a reflection of who they feel they want to be rather than who they are. It is an identity that is performed rather than represented hence is inauthentic. However, understanding that individuals create a situated presence online (Stern, 2003) and their performance of self is a journey into the becoming of self, any form of online identity should be accepted as a personal truth and therefore authentic to the individual.

Yet according to Cowan (2005) people may claim a gnostic authority and consequently present incorrect practices. This misinformation may then be harmful to those who are using the Internet to explore personal identities. The Life History Narrative witches however never saw online identities as problematic or harmful to the community. Tanya did offer some concerns about new pagan identities not being authentic yet acknowledged that "everybody has their own Truth" which is a sentiment that most witches online and offline adhere to.

Yet playing with and frequently changing online identities, names and profiles is part of the online culture within social networking spaces (Warburton, 2009). Second Life residents create and recreate avatars that present a persona within the virtual world environment, which at times may be contrary to their offline realities. For example, a

person may be a vampire (as evidenced in image 17a) or a robot (image 17b). On the one hand such identities demonstrate a playful attitude to online identity construction as was discussed in chapter three of this thesis, yet on the other it could be because Second Life is also considered to be a gaming platform and so play is part of its purpose and should not be taken too seriously.

Through engaging with Netnography[55] between 2015 and 2017 I met avatars within Second Life who presented a plethora of physical identities, for example, vampires, angels, priest, robot and 'no-one'. Each person was playing with identities that were far removed from their real selves and frequently changed their appearance.
Often a resident presented a more perfect example of themselves or something that represented who they wished to be for example, young or slim, heavily pierced or tattooed or had different hair colour. When offered the opportunity to recreate appearance, it was usual for people to want to modify aspects of personal appearance and as such their online appearance was contrary to their offline identity (Anarbaeva, 2012; Boellstorff, 2008). In some cases, an individual created more than one avatar that showed dual or multiple aspects to their offline self. This was something that I encountered within the platform. The residents did not see having multiple identities and avatars as unusual practice.

I too created multiple avatars when I explored Second Life (image 17e). One avatar was named Foxglove Inkpen and she was created before I started the research for this thesis. Image 17c is a screenshot of the avatar and was used for personal exploration of the site. Foxglove looked and behaved differently to the way I would offline for

[55] Netnography is discussed in chapter two and is the term coined by Kozinets (2010) that describes online participant observations and online ethnography

example she would go car racing or be naked on a beach. The other avatar I named Irene Inkpen and is image 17d. She was specifically created for research. This research avatar initially looked differently to me but when I realised that this could be considered unethical, she became more closely related to my offline image. Upon reflection my offline self, affected the online behaviours of both my avatars which was also the feedback I gained from the informal conversations I had with some Second Life residents.

Such a finding is similar to Anarbaeva's (2012) research that explored the chosen genders and ethnicities of four Second Life residents. She noticed that the residents played within the fluid non-binary virtual environment so that they could explore what it meant to be of a different gender, race or ethnicity thus exploring the power relationships that was attached to each identity. Originally the participants chose an identity that was different to the offline self but eventually the appearances merged to become similar. Anarbaeva's research and my study seem to agree and note that the offline self is affecting decisions about the performance of online identities. Some decisions are more authentic to one's true nature than others.

An example of an offline identity affecting an online persona in order to represent an authentic self was within the Second Life island, The Sacred Cauldron.[56] During participating in online moots, I had an informal conversation with a resident and asked why they had decided to present their avatar as a Dragon. The reply was "It represents my dragonhood". This individual felt that the Second Life platform

[56] Sacred Cauldron is a designated area on Second Life for pagan activities such as online moots, learning, mediation and ritual. The interface looks like a wooden circle (henge) and there are dedicated places for online pixelated mediation and learning.

enabled him to show his inner nature, his authentic, true self through the visual representation of a dragon. He felt that other social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter may have allowed him to use depicted metaphors of dragons but did not necessarily allow him the opportunity to perform and embody a dragon because of the infrastructures. Thus, the fluid, non-binary, play-like platform of Second Life was an enabler for him to become Dragon. This online public identity was accepted and validated by the online Second Life community, which may not have been the same for the offline community. Dragon was his identity, and no one questioned his authenticity.

There have been many examples of a Facebook user stating that Witchcraft has helped them find their authentic self. Now self-identifying as a witch, they feel they are being truer to themselves. For example, within the closed group The Defiant Crone it is usual for new members to write a brief biography explaining their journey and noting how the online platform is a place where they could finally be themselves. The women (and in fewer cases men) expressed comments that identified past prejudice, the growth of personal belief systems and finally an acceptance of themselves as a witch. One 35-year old English female member of the group in September 2018 noted how her physical ailments were painful but her spirituality as a devotee of Hecate helped her cope. The post included an image of her wearing a veil and said that the veil openly identified her as a Crone. She was proud of her journey and pleased to be part of the online community. The image and post implied she was proud of being her true self. Responses to that posts (and other similar posts) from the online community reflected similar attitudes and demonstrated support to becoming Witch. The community confirmed her identity through positive

reinforcements and her response was thanking them because it made her feel more confident to share her beliefs.

Ravensgrove Coven is a public Facebook group and, similarly to the closed group of The Defiant Crone, had many posts reflecting how becoming Witch enabled individuals to be their true selves. Often comments within this group (as indicated in the comments below) noted that identifying as a witch enabled them to be authentic to their true nature.

> "[Witch allows] myself to be who I truly am"
>
> "I embrace the title and am proud to bear it"
>
> "It means I have the courage and strength to allow myself to be who I truly am and won't become anyone else's idea of what they think I should be"

Likewise, the Facebook group Pagan/Wiccan Magic Tolerance in Finding your Path include posts that note an individualistic approach to being a witch (see example below).

> "Many witches make the mistake of casting spells... It's ok to stutter during a spell. It's okay to make mistakes. It's all in the intention"
>
> "I trip over my words all the time...I messed up and started laughing at myself"
>
> "When I can be me, be real, I am much more powerful"
>
> "This is me. A Storm-Witch. I am so happy I've been guided to this path. It took my whole life, but I have finally found where and who I'm supposed to be"

Whether a solitary witch or conducting Witchcraft with other self-identified witches, both were considered to be an acceptable form of Witchcraft. The community confirmed that being true and authentic to oneself was the essential part of a witch Occasionally, authenticity was demonstrated on Facebook (image 20) and Pinterest (image 21) through images, memes, poetry and postings (image 22). The messages within the posts and responses from the community promoted being authentic to oneself; being different; being proud of imperfections; standing up for personal belief systems and lifestyles (sistersofthemist, 2019, image 23). The comments and memes that were shared within the social media platforms demonstrate how identifying as Witch enable people to have more fulfilled lives because they were no longer hiding their true nature. The online Witch communities support authenticity and many posts offer affirmations of encouragement to be true to Witch selves.

It seems that online social networking platforms and discussion forums are offering a safe space for individuals to attempt to express their Witch identities and confirm who they really are. Jenny noted that this was also the purpose of her pagan moot page on Facebook, “It’s to provide a safe space for people to get together with other people in order to facilitate their own self-study”. What is more, many online posts identified with how the individuals had always been a witch but only when they acknowledged this, did they feel they were being authentic to themselves.

4.2.1 Witchcraft is Innate in Witches

Many of the participants in the Life History narrative interviews noted that Paganism and Witchcraft "kinda spoke to me" (Holly) or offered a "particular view of spirituality which I think just chimed with me" (Holly).

"It wasn't like I was converted it was like I was already converted, I just finally found the name for it" (Holly)

"Like, I've always been drawn towards that. Always been drawn to a different kind of way" (Kelly)

"Things just come to you" (Felicity)

Sally said that "there's an interest that's always been there" and this interest is what she actively explored online. Images and posts that highlighted the concept of Witchcraft 'speaking to me' are reflected within social networking spaces such as Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest. The concept of Paganism and Witchcraft as innate is portrayed in memes throughout the visual discourses in the online posts.

The Life History Narrative interviews, tweets, images and online community postings show that the opportunity to become Witch and connect with Witchcraft is instinctive and innate. It was acknowledged that Witch identity and praxis lies dormant yet can be awakened through engaging with courses, reading around a topic or through life experiences. Mike suggested "you knew what you were doing without actually knowing what you were doing", and Ellie commented that "I go off anything that jumps out from a gut perspective". Sally agreed and stated, "it comes to you

naturally because it's the power of your own words and the power of your intent and it's what you want".

Thus, Witchcraft is a practice that an individual is already doing and has tacit understanding of. For example, individuals noted that exploring aspects of The Craft was a natural process and that they felt they already knew how to use some of the basics of Witchcraft such as the properties of herbs and plants, the cycle of the seasons, supernatural encounters and the moon/sun connections. The realisation of their own witch becoming happened when they became actively conscious of the connection between what they innately knew about The Craft and what they were already doing.

"I was looking at Paganisms finding it interesting…and then there was a part that fit, and I was thinking… Oh that's like me, Oh … Oh! Actually, this is REALLY like me!" (Grace)

The acceptance that there is tacit understanding of Witchcraft is innate in all witches is also evident online and is exemplified by the statements in images 24, 25 and 27. Also within the comments in image 26.

Such images are examples of literal and higher order metaphors (Papaloukas, Quincey and Williamson, 2017: 403). A witch will post an image that chimes with their belief system or philosophy in some way. If the post is within the literal category, then the image is likely to be understood without explanation. It may have a quote or meme to help explain the image but usually the meaning is obvious and literal. However, a high order metaphoric category (2017: 430) conceptualises an

idea but the image and post are very likely to need further explanation, and this would be discussed within the comment section.

Chamberlain (2000) argues that photo-elicitation is useful to help understand the psyche of an individual and their emotions attached to a specific concept, experience or event and notes this as 'methodolatory'. Photographs can tell the onlooker more about what someone is feeling because the images are contextual and "embedded, meaningful objects of specific lifeworld" (Papaloukas et al, 2017: 427). The images in Appendix three are some examples of literal metaphors that show Witchcraft as being innate and Witch as being part of who a person is. Screenshot image 27 and 28 notes a person is magical. Image 29 suggests magic is everywhere. Image 30 states that Witchcraft is a lifestyle and image 31 notes that becoming a witch means a person will be enlightened.

The images within Wiccan witch Harmony Nice's Instagram profile depict high order Witch metaphors (image 32). This is because they have visual discourses that use a-typical Witch rhetoric. For example the image may contain a Book of Shadows, a pentagram, a cat, a cauldron, a broom, nature but also the image is staged so it contains a general message that connects with onlookers as is demonstrated in Instagram images 32, 33 and 34. The purpose of such stylised images would be to illustrate a more personal meaning for the individual who posted it (image 34). Yet it is the comments with the image that help further clarify the personal meaning because the image is figurative (image 33).

Furthermore, some of the messages within social networking spaces can be understood and are relatable because of the meme that is contained. Many examples contained in Appendix three are memes.[57] Campbell (2018: 32) argues that there are different types of memes that are used in religion. She categorises seven genres within memes that affect perceptions and how religions are framed. The categories are:

1. Stock character memes with religious themes – this would include an image from popular culture such as a character from a film with religious text added (chapter four image 7 includes a character from the TV series Buffy the Vampire Slayer and chapter six image 1 includes Sabrina who is the main character from TV series Bewitched)
2. Religious figure memes – includes an image with a known religious figure that contains humour or religious reference (chapter five image 27 shows an image of the Virgin Mary and image 29 shows door evangelists)
3. Reaction memes – images with statements that encourage negative or positive reactions from the reader (chapter five image 28 is an image of a nun)
4. Stock character memes – images of news events or people (chapter four image 51 and 52 show witches protesting Donald Trump and defending reproduction rights)
5. Religious Spoof memes – images with exaggerated religious themes that can be positive or negative (chapter five image 28 shows the cartoon image of a nun and a schoolboy and chapter five image 30 notes Christmas is a pagan festival)

[57] See for example Appendix three chapter 4 images 7, 21, 24, 28, 30, 31, 35, 36, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 66, 72: chapter 5 images 27, 28, 29, 38, 32, 33. Also, chapter 6 images 1, 2, 4, 5a, 5b, 26, 27, 28, 30, 33 and chapter 7 images 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12.

6. Implicit religion memes – secular images that inhabit religious-like features (chapter four image 36 is of a woman in a cape implying a solitary witch)
7. Video memes – video that uses religion as a backdrop e.g. poems, songs, parody (chapter four screenshot video image 19 of the poem related to the meme we are the granddaughters you could not burn)

Images resonate with a wide selection of people. This then makes the individual share the image or like it. Accordingly, the message and image become a meme because of the algorithmic authority (Campbell, 2018). The meme's message evolves into an accepted understanding of Witch and Witchcraft. This is also an example of Rhizome Theory because it demonstrates how an idea can be shared and altered within a digital network. In sum, the images and memes contained within the images, video, comments and online posts help to form heuristic of Witch that then spreads through the online social platforms and are reinforced through users feeling an attachment to them. Such ideas are then reified through comments, likes and re-sharing.

The comments attached to images such as that of self-identified Wiccan Witch Harmony Nice[58] (images 32, 33 and 34) exemplify rhizomatic influences to becoming Witch. Followers and subscribers to Harmony's Instagram account and YouTube channel have used her posts for self-study. The ideas and images are utilised to create their own knowledge base. Consequently, Harmony's images and

[58] Harmony Nice is a British witch in her 20s and self-promotes herself as a Wiccan Witch. She has thousands of followers on YouTube, Twitter and Instagram and provides advice about modern day Witchcraft. She published her first book about Wicca in October 2018

videos have become rhizomes, and Harmony herself is an example of mycelium because she has created her own form of Witch and Witchcraft. Hence her online profile is a good example of Rhizome-Mycelium Theory, which is the theoretical framework for this thesis, and is explored within chapter two. Furthermore, in this instance, Instagram and YouTube are plateaus that enable rhizomes because they facilitate the theory to happen (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013).

In her Life History Narrative interview, Tanya noted that,

"What will eventually happen. We will have a split in pagan reality where we have real life pagans and we may well end up with a whole new subculture of the occult. We are possibly already going that way. Where they are almost entirely online. I don't necessarily think it's a bad thing. It will grow and either succeed or fail." (Tanya)

Tanya's comment suggests therefore that learning from online witches such as Harmony Nice, is a natural process of contemporary Paganism and an example of liquid modernity. She did however stress that she does not wish to be the same type of witch as the online witches because her identity is very different.

4.2.2 Witches as Solitary Practitioners of The Craft

Many of the posts and all of the Life History Narrative participants identified themselves as solitary either for a period of time, such as Jenny "I was solitary for 10 years" or all of the time as with the case of Penny "I practice alone… I'm solo". Many self-proclaimed witches are solitary and identify with the title of solitary witch. Many Facebook groups offer spells that suggest solitary Witchcraft is a common practice. At times images on Pinterest, such as image 35 that shows a

solitary witch in a sacred circle with a statement that notes she is solitary, and image 36 that states she likes to be alone, demonstrate that identifying as a solitary witch is part of the journey of becoming Witch. Screenshot image 37 notes that being solitary is a valid way to practice Witchcraft.

Occasionally however individuals, such as David, were forced to be a solitary witch because of personal circumstances such as not having enough physical space for a group gathering or not enough people to form a coven. Consequently, a witch would move their practice online so, although still solitary, they used online forums to confirm their practise and create a sense of community. As Jenny noted earlier in this chapter, online is a safe place to become Witch and it is not always necessary to have a physical space to practice The Craft.

Often images and postings related to solitary practice have some connection with nature and the outside, as is exemplified with image 41 and screenshot image 43, that include outdoor meditation or symbols related to nature. Furthermore, on occasion posts depicted group ritual or personal ritual whilst skyclad as is demonstrated in image 38 that depicts a group of naked women conducting a sacred ritual. Furthermore, Twitter images 39 and 40 show a witch's solitary practice whilst skyclad and image 42 presents a naked woman within a stone circle. Often ritual is performed skyclad because being naked is a "way of breaking barriers down" (David) and being authentic.

Having an affinity with nature and the earth was also reflected in the Life History Narrative interviews where there was an expression of nature being part of their true

self. For example, Felicity said “I’ve always been very in touch with nature… had an affinity with the outdoors”, and Sienna suggested that the reason for using nature was for healing purposes; “I want to use nature for myself and other people for healing for good”. In agreement Mike confirmed that, “being a witch was doing what already happened, but stronger. So, working with herbs, working with the land, working with the entities, working with spirits, working with healing hands, tweaking energies.”

Becoming an authentic witch therefore, happens when individuals accept what has influenced them and acknowledge how their tacit knowledge affects what they do and consequently, who they are. This is verified in the playful images, memes and postings within various social networking spaces.

4.3 The Goddess and God in Witchcraft

When discussing divinity, the dataset of the Life History Narrative Interviews indicated a link to goddess-talk and god-talk (Mantin, 2004). Thus, for some, becoming Witch meant the acknowledgement of male and female deities or energies. Some witches used both to define their personal understandings of Witch.

“I LOVE the idea of a goddess rather than a god… like the concept of the goddess because with her male lover and partner” (Kelly)

“I use the term God and Goddess. I pray to the God every now and then…I think we are all the Goddess, it’s just finding it” (Penny)

“I never saw validity of choosing a goddess to the exclusion of a god” (Tanya)

The balance and union of the male/female or god/goddess is also evident online in merchandise as is presented in images 43 and 44. Many images and discussions that are tweeted, shared and posted during the pagan May day festival Beltane (which happens in the spring in the northern hemisphere and in the autumn in the southern hemisphere) and shows the union of the Male God and Female Goddess. Images 44, 45, 46 and 48 suggest that pagan divinity is dualistic. Mantin argues that this duality may be because "God-talk… has framed the view that they [feminists] wish to deconstruct" (2004: 213). Hence goddess-talk uses the structures of god-talk. Goddess-talk explores the patriarchal constructs of theological discourses and because individuals do not have an alternative language or theological frame to explain the sacred, they use god-talk to explain the goddess (Griffin, 1995; Mantin 2004; Plaskow and Christ, 2014). This is evident in the Tumblr image 46 and the Pinterest image 47 that use the same image and use language to describe the relationship between Mother Goddess and Father God. The posts include both god and goddess, yet many online witches and the Life History Narrative witches did not focus on the male god but did use the male to describe the female.

Theological language has historically been focused on the male; an example of this would be Eliade (1987) who uses patriarchal theology to describe hierophany[59] as the manifestation of (a male) God who embodies all things to religious man. However, in liquid-modern times the divine and manifestation of the sacred is not always defined through patriarchal tropes. It is explored through a thealogical lens and through the

[59] Hierophany is the term Eliade uses to explain how God is manifested in everything. 'Religious man' will always recognize God within every tree, object, animal, flower

feminine. Thus, the male and female, god and goddess binary are not always important to a witch.

A witch will identify with Goddess and indicate specific female deities, demonstrating the witch's relationship to the sacred. Yet they will also feel comfortable blending or fusing "Christian and Neo-Pagan elements in their worship" (Beavis, 2016: 126) hence their spirituality may be evidence of "Christian Goddess Spirituality" (ibid) that is a bricolage of divinity rather than a theological understanding of God. Goddess as a symbol of the divine could also be a "non-realist expression of the sacred" (Mantin, 2004: 218) and goddess becomes a metaphor for the divine rather than the actuality of the divine.

The Life History Narrative witches used language associated with the Goddess that showed the divine (that was male, female, both or gender neutral) as embodied in their lives and actively present. Five of the Life History Narrative witches believed in a Pantheon and each deity were used for specific purposes. The God/Goddess became a real embodied expression of the sacred. Furthermore, one participant was an atheist and did not recognise any divinity. Two others had dualistic understandings of God and Goddess yet in the main, preferred the feminine divine. The remaining five focused mainly on the Goddess and saw her as the embodiment of nature over time (Christ and Plaskow, 2017: 100).

The language used by participants and images from social networking spaces relate to the benevolence of the female divine and the concept of mothering. Felicity noted "Mother Earth is more than just the earth but is a powerful force. A feminine type of

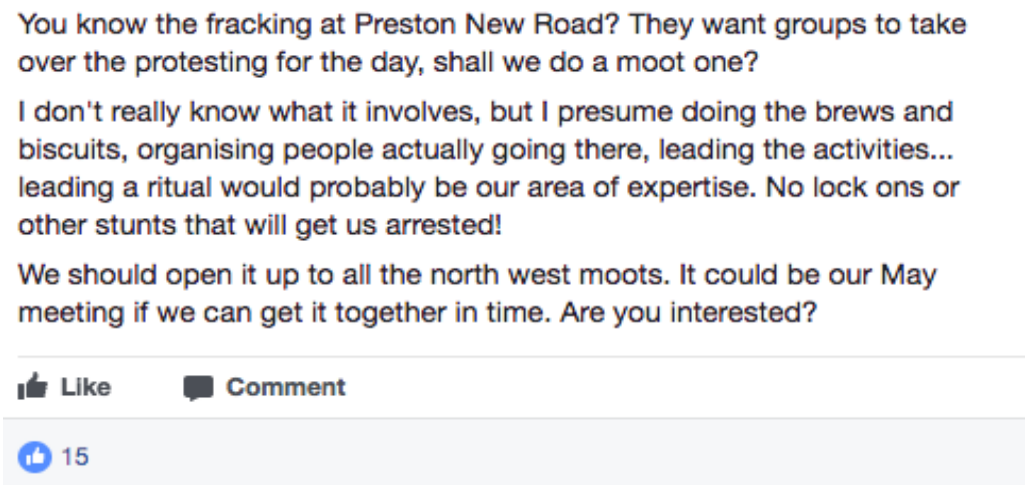
spirit", and Holly stated, "I think the idea of the goddess and of the earth was very strong belief that I had you know, even before I was a pagan, and was able to put a name on it". The online discourses further demonstrate the embodiment of the nurturing divine in nature (Klassen, 2005) as is evident in images 49 and 50 that depict Gaia and Mother Earth.

Moreover, at times there was an anti-patriarchal discourse within the Life History Narrative interviews. Sienna, for example, when discussing her spirituality in relation to Christianity, noted "as a woman I don't think I have a place in this religion as much as a man", and continued stating, "that always bothered me about Christianity, because I get there is a big sexist element to it. Lots of other religions as well but I don't think there is that in pagan religions. I think women and men are both valued equally". Hence some of the witches interviewed, actively chose a Goddess spirituality that related to their feminist principles. White (2019: 7) argues that "to truly liberate ourselves from these patriarchal ideologies we need an alternative divine image to reflect on" as a form of liberation from patriarchal restrictions. 11 Life History Narrative witches actively chose a female deity or acknowledged the female goddess as having more validity and agency than a male god.

The active choice to be anti-patriarchy is an example of third wave feminism. Women celebrate individualities and use systems and ideas for self-empowerment. However, fourth wave feminism that is intersectional and actively uses digital media to protest about social issues such as abortion laws and misogynist policy, is also evident online. For example, within the news reports of witches conducting mass

spells to stop Donald Trump (BBC, 2018) and within hashtags such as #WitchesAgainstTrump in social media (images 51 and 52).

Yet none of the Life History Narrative witches used social networking spaces to fight against patriarchy, mainly because they felt collective online protesting did not feel part of their authentic self. Although they understood the value of using collective energies for spell casting, they preferred to protest patriarchy by choosing the Goddess rather than the God. This sentiment was also mirrored online and at times witches discussed displeasure about ecological issues within a social chat room but did not do collective spell casting online. For example, a Lancashire based Facebook group discussed the possibility of meeting offline to protest about the Fracking[60] that was happening in their local area, yet this did not seem to happen too often with this group.



[60] Fracking (hydraulic fracturing) is a process of injecting liquid into the ground so to fracture rock and collect gas that is trapped there. It has caused some controversy in Lancashire because of the tests have caused earthquakes and transporting the contaminated liquid can be potentially a health risk. Some pagans state that fracking rapes mother earth.

4.3.1 Reclaiming the Crone

"Reclaiming female power and liberating the crone, hag, cat lady, witch harlot, whore from demonization and the mocking humour cruelly thrown at those women who do not fit into the "normal" role ascribed by our patriarchal society" (White, 2019: 7) is another reason why some of the Life History Narrative witches chose the Goddess over the God. The more mature women in this study felt that Paganism offered them a place to use their wisdom and maintain their sense of place within a society that often dismissed the older or ageing generation, especially if they a woman.

"It's nice to think that as you're getting older you have some value… there's a lot of currency in young women who can produce children and when you've gone through that phase and had your children…you're moving out of that phase in a way. It's almost like you lose value so as you become more middle-aged you lose value. People talk about you becoming invisible in society or you know you're not what's seen as pretty anymore because… young people look at you as if you are a little bit past it and I think that's a shame… so, I think in the pagan religion that's a really strong positive that as you get older that that is valued. So, you can maybe see a role for yourself" (Sienna)

Also embracing the triple goddess and seeing value in all the stages of life, enables women to consider themselves as continuing to be purposeful into old age. Felicity noted that she became more confident as she got older, Tanya shared her expertise with younger coven members. Sienna noted the stereotype of ageing and how becoming Witch was active feminism that liberates women.

"What would you rather? A diddery old dear who sits there, and everybody rolls their eyes about or someone like a medicine woman who has some wisdom to import and can look after people and nurture them? I know which role model I'm going to follow" (Sienna).

Similar attitudes are prevalent within social networking spaces. Crone and hag are often images that are shared alongside powerful messages of empowerment and agency. Occasionally the posts actively fight against patriarchy by reclaiming the crone's agency and her role as Woman and Witch. She is portrayed as a source of independent power and wisdom with self-efficacy. Examples are within images of the crone in 53 and 54. They note that the crone dances with the earth, enjoys being creative and has value. More, image 56 notes that age brings wisdom and strength.

Further, such images and postings take a feminist stance that actively protests stereotyping the crone and Witch and fights against the ageist stereotype of older women as asexual and incompetent (Henneberg, 2010). The statement within image 56 notes that in history patriarchy diminished the value of the hag, crone, woman.

In contrast to the images of the empowered crone, there are many public postings on Pinterest and Instagram and within private Facebook groups of nubile, vamp-like sexually charged young witches, which could be considered as anti-feminist. For example, image 72 depicts a sexualised witch on a broom and image 73 of a semi-naked witch who is depicted as a sexually charged Lilith. On the one hand the images engender a discourse of women as being sexual objects, yet on the other, the posts could rather epitomise the liberal attitude towards gender and sexualities within paganism rather than sexist attitudes towards women. To know for certain whether

this is the case, it would be necessary to interview the individual who posted the images, which is problematic due to the rhizomatic nature of social media platforms.

Yet Life History Narrative participant David, is involved in many closed pagan social media groups and frequently posts and reposts images of a sexually stereotypical nature. He claims that the images he chooses simply reflect his spiritual expression and he notes that nudity is a "form of breaking barriers down". Sex is not a taboo subject in paganism and sexualisation of a witch is a form of empowerment and liberation not a form of patriarchal oppression (Luhrmann, 2001). Male witches are also sexualised within social networking space for example images 57, 58 and 59 depict naked men with signifiers such as a cat, pointed hat, cloak or flying on a broomstick. Similar to the discourses related to the empowered crone, these images could be seen as examples of activist feminism used to raise awareness of Witch being both male and a female or gender neutral as is the meme in images 60 and 61, yet equally they could be perceived as examples of sexism.

What is possibly even more interesting however is that there are very few images of the young Maiden witch where she is not seen as thin, sexualised, and attractive. The lack of 'real' representations of the female has been raised as a concern within some closed Facebook groups. This lack of representation of various types of Maiden witches suggests that even within the empowerment of becoming Witch and the reclaiming of the crone, there is still a female idealisation and stereotype for younger women. Images of a witch as ethnically white, young, thin and sexy dominate the social networking spaces.

White (2019: 8) argues that it is through "Goddess feminism that women… can reconnect with their bodies and experience a greater sense of embodiment as women", and so society should challenge the patriarchal stereotype of Witch and Woman. The young Maiden witch should have the same saliency, as the crone thus alternative images of the Maiden should be represented. Occasionally this happens with images 62, 63, 64 and 65 that show larger witches, but such images continue to sexualise women as objects of desire. The cartoons show young voluptuous witches dressed in stockings, suspenders and wearing clothes that reveal large breasts. Although the outfit could be a performance that includes the signifiers that identify Woman (Butler, 1988) the images could also potentially be a repeated performance of Witch (Salih, 2002; Greenough, 2018). Hence if sexualised images of a female witch (or male) are repeatedly shared then the hegemonic view is that Witch is sexual. The idea of performing Witch identities is discussed in more detail in chapter six.

Witch is intended to be a gender-neutral term hence men and women can claim the term Witch. This is evident with the Life History Narratives and within online posts. Yet it is interesting to observe that within a non-normative faith tradition, there is still a normative discourse about what it means to be a witch within Paganism. Overall, online images, posts and within the Life History Narrative interviews, Witch discourses tend to be female-centric. A witch is usually gendered with she/ her. This could be due to the history of witches being identified as female in the Malleus Malefacarum (MacKay, 2009) or reinforcement of stereotype or a form of unconscious bias with Western society. Indeed, the data in this thesis is gendered yet

this is due to it reflecting the Life History Narrative demographic rather than my own unconscious bias.

4.4 The Occult and Witch

Witch is a term that is often associated with the occult and supernatural aspects of spirituality. Sally noted that when she started to study Witchcraft, she had to order books from the occult section in a bookshop. She felt that placing texts about alternative spiritualties such as reiki or tarot within the occult section (rather than the faith section) was not necessarily correct. This was because she believed the term occult was considered by many to be connected to the devil, but she believed that The Craft was not about the occult.

Hutton notes (1999: 69-72) that historically the negative and fearful connotations attached to Witchcraft, for example the pentagram, demons and magic was tied up with the term occult and occultism. Part of this he claims, was because it was practised by secret societies. However, for those who practise Witchcraft, occult is a positive term, and means hidden knowledge that is not always obvious or accepted by general society (Alder, 1986: 12). This means, occult is anything that is supernatural, intuitive, or unexplained through science. Occult therefore could involve invoking the goddess, angels and demons but equally can be about personal intuition about an event or spiritualism.

Yet popular culture and social networking spaces are possibly reinforcing society's view that the occult is the use of evil forces and dark satanic magic. For example, the witches within the Netflix series *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018 to date)

widely use symbols such as the pentagram and the term occult when characters discuss their religion (which is called *The House of Night*) and worshipping Lucifer. Posts about this popular series demonstrate that there is an accepted understanding that Witchcraft is related to occult and horror, as is evident in the hashtags and comment within the Twitter post below.

Finished binge watching @sabrinanetflix . If you love @CW_Riverdale you will love this series. A coming-of-age story filled with #horror, the **#occult** #witchcraft and much more. Great cast. Looking forward to Season 2.

Likewise, other programmes such as Amazon Prime's series *Lucifer* (2016 to date) and the BBC 2019 series *Good Omens* includes occult references to the Bible and Satan.

Adding to the hegemonic discourse surrounding the occult and evil #occult or #Occult in search engines tend to produce posts that include theological images and symbols. For example, goat-like or deer-like gods with horns and hooves tend to look like the stereotypical image of the devil, exemplified in image 70. A pagan however would know such images to be the Celtic god Cernunnos, Pan or the demon Baphomet. Only occasionally is it Satan. The messages and memes contained with the images are not necessarily reactionary memes but more religious spoof memes or religious figure memes (Campbell, 2018: 32) therefore the purpose of the post is for humour. However, to a non-pagan, postings that contain the hashtag #Occult have the potential to reinforce assumptions that Witchcraft is evil such as image 69. Also, that the Occult is related to fornicating with the devil in some way; evidenced in image 68. Yet Witchcraft and Witch is neither, good or bad; sacred or profane; white or black, as evidenced in the comments within screenshot images 66 and 67. Witchcraft

is both and so to a witch, the occult will be both. Occult tools such as tarot cards and pendulums therefore are the enablers to make the hidden (i.e. spirits, energy, intuition) visible to the witch.

Only Sally, Derek and Tanya used the term occult in their life History Narrative interviews. Tanya identified that the "alternative faiths world", was the same as "the occult world" and used both terms interchangeably. All 13 participants however did relate to the concept of hidden energies for example ghosts and fae. Although they did not all use the term occult, they were very comfortable talking about superstition, supernatural events, prophecy and discussing alternative realms of existence:

"things happen, and you can't just put it down to coincidence" (Felicity)

"I've been regressed lots of times and one of the times I was regressed which was actually very, very emotional" (Sienna)

"I'm told seeing dead people isn't cool… feeling energy, healing hands so stuff like prophetic dreams and stuff like that, that's really, not very good. So that made me question." (Mike discussing why he explored Paganisms)

"What I have discovered is that when we've done ritual often photos don't come out! They're really, really blurry for some reason or they get lost in the upload… and It's not just me! Or the photos will look particularly eerie or rubbish" (Tanya)

Tanya suggested that the reasons for the technology not working, was supernatural and occult.

4.4.1 Witches and the Supernatural

The hidden becoming unhidden was a common rhetoric within the narratives. Five participants identified that their path started when they acknowledged that they were experiencing apparitions of the dead and spirit energies.

"Probably from a very early age. I saw something that I would call supernatural…I used to hear voices and hear a woman and I would think it was my mum calling me and my mum would be asleep. I'd go into the bedroom and go 'what do you want mum?' and she's like 'it's 3 o' clock in the morning! What are you doing?" (Tanya)

"Growing up I was aware of things around me and the presence of different spirits and entities" (Mike)

"I think one of the first experiences for me was probably an orb-gold ball size. It came out of nowhere, from one side of my room… and straight into the boiler room and made a big bang." (Ellie)

"I sense energies" (Sienna)

The experiences of Tanya, Mike, Ellie and Sienna prompted them to further investigate and develop an interest in the paranormal. Their experiences made them realise that not everyone could experience spirits the way they could. Furthermore, they felt that the experiences enabled them to conclude that there was the possibility of a spiritual realm in addition to the physical world they experienced. This personal revelation enabled them to develop some confidence with their capabilities of using occult materials such as tarot, crystals, the pendulum and dowsing rods to explore the supernatural.

Not all the 13 participants were able to experience ghosts and spirits, however all used occult materials for divination, guidance and/or connection with the Goddess/God. Having such tools enabled them to form a witch identity because they felt it was part of The Craft of being a pagan and a witch.

"It's a good way for people to see that there is energy beyond our selves" (Lexie discussing pendulum)

"I do believe in using smudging sticks and I think you feel better for it. I can sense energy lifting… I put crystals in and I dowse" (Felicity)

"I've cleansed the house with sage this year" (Sally)

"I have tarot cards… I don't let people touch them… I use a crystal. I make a lot of decisions with a crystal… I started dabbling more because I needed to concentrate so the ouija board came out" (Penny)

Sally however did not want to acknowledge spirits or work with them and so would limit this aspect of Witchcraft due to fear of the unknown.

"I've had experience, I blink them out! My reiki master said do a mediumship course, but I can't you know!... I had a little boy on the stairs and stuff. You obviously don't need spirit presence when you're on your own! It does scare me!" (Sally)

Experiences with spirits and occult tools, such as dowsing rods or ouija boards, did prompt some of the participants to explore séances and take part in paranormal investigations. Mike and Penny found that when on an investigation (not together) they attracted lots of spirits and ended up leading the event. "I went on a ghost hunt with some friends and it ended up with me running the thing because I was getting

more than him" (Penny). This prompted them both to lead more paranormal events and in Mike's instance, teach his knowledge of The Craft and the occult in public events and moots. Consequently, Mike created a rhizome of offline networks that linked occult practices and interest in the supernatural. He became recognised as having authority within the pagan community and offering another way to practice the Craft hence is an example of Rhizome-Mycelium Theory.

There were many posts within the social networking spaces that identified with the opinions of the Life History Narrative witches. People shared their stories and asked the online pagan communities to confirm that they were not alone in being able to feel spirit energies. Furthermore, online communities offered advice on how to use occult tools and work spells.

For example, members of the closed Facebook groups, The Witches Hut and Pagan/Wiccan Tolerance in Finding your Path, often asked each other for collective blessings or advice about occult practices such as how to create smudging sticks; how to protect family members or themselves from psychic attack; how to create an altar or wand. They also shared spells or knowledge about aspects of Witchcraft. In addition, members shared examples of their altars, magical tools or asked advice. This was not unique to closed groups. Many public social networking spaces such as YouTube, public Facebook groups and Instagram also shared information and stories about the paranormal. In general, closed groups focused on personal accounts of paranormal activity, whereas public groups explored general encounters or ideas about energies.

An example of members supporting with advice is from Pagan/Wiccan Tolerance in Finding your Path. A member of the group felt they had fae[61] in their home. They noted that wood-chippings were left inside the house and they believed it to be a sign for the presence of fae folk. They did not want to include iron in the house (which is a ward for fae) because they usually liked working with fae, but they had a young baby and they felt that they needed the fae to stop being mischievous. There were 14 responses to this post all of which accepted that fae existed and agreed that iron could cause a pixie to become vengeful. A few members replied by giving practical advice.

Another example in the same group was a post that asked for reassurance about seeing "people who are not there", and although this person was used to seeing spirits, they needed advice because the sighting was becoming more frequent. 19 people responded and 15 confirmed that they had the same or similar experience. 11 explained what they could be, i.e. shadow people or spirit guides or the deceased.

These two examples suggest that online Facebook groups can be safe spaces to share non-normative beliefs and enable witches to feel they can show vulnerabilities. Offline a witch may be reticent to share occult practices or belief systems, but online many seemed to be less fearful of negative reactions. The Life History Narrative participant Jenny created a closed Facebook group and said its purpose was "to provide a safe space for people to get together with other people in order to facilitate own self- study". She said that there were limited offline spaces to share knowledge and so social media platforms are an alternative solution.

[61] Fae is the collective name given to fairies, goblins, sprites, pixies and relates to folk lore

It was common for witches however to take part in offline and online forums to discuss pagan practices and learn about the occult. For example, Sienna and Penny attended Spiritualist churches to explore their awareness of the paranormal. David and Jenny took part in various rituals within covens and Mike ran a pagan moot. Sienna said, "I felt I fitted in" after experimentation with a selection of spiritualist groups before choosing one. The Life History Narrative witches seemed to want to be part of a larger community so that they did not feel alone, however they also felt there were limited offline options. They went online to learn from others and to try to find any local moots, training events and in some cases, covens.

The online environment instilled a sense of trust and this was one of the reasons why the Life History Narrative witches readily used the online community. Furthermore, because online groups included mission statements, code of ethics and/or a rationale for being online, the Life History Narrative witches and the online community felt that it was safe space to share alternative beliefs. Closed groups had an ethos that catered for like-minded individuals who needed a space to share occult praxis. Occasionally the ethos was reminded to the online group as is exemplified in the post below.

> "I am here to assist and teach as much as I am here to learn. Being here should be fun… please feel especially welcome if you feel you have nowhere else to go to talk about darker things like invoking angels/demons."

Posts such as this offered each member capital within the online group culture. This helped to build a community of practice and share pagan experiences (Grenfell, 2008).

Ghosts, spirits and connecting with the dead are acknowledged within social networking spaces as being an aspect of what it means to be a witch. The postings and hashtags indicated that ghosts and spirits and the occult, was part of what it means to be Witch as exemplified in the poem in image 71. Therefore, if a person felt inclined to re-tweet or share such an image, posting or video it would suggest that it resonated with them in some way and it could be an indicator that the post is helping them to confirm their Witch identity. Likewise, if they were the originator of the post, then they will have created a public display about how they felt they were becoming Witch. Hence, they are creating who they want to become by writing that identity into being (Stern, 2003; Greenough, 2017). What is more interesting is that the more a post, image, meme, hashtag is shared, the more the content becomes an accepted witch norm.

Nine of the Life History Narrative participants noted that they used social networking spaces such as blogs, Pinterest, Instagram to confirm what they were doing was correct and to gain further ideas. Exploring online sites gave them confidence to continue with their personalised craft and confirmed the witch they wanted to become.

"I would look at people's blogs and websites and things… it's not necessarily that I wanted to copy it but it's like I think 'oh it's Winter Solstice, it would be really nice

to celebrate as a family – what do other people do? I might save it as a pin or share" (Sienna)

"Often I see a pagan Facebook group and all sorts of things. People have huge amazing altars with all sorts of stuff on them, but it's very different to how I would do it." (Holly)

Such behaviours suggest that a self-identified witch will create their offline praxis through connecting with online posts about Witchcraft and the occult. They acknowledge their connection to the public post by sharing or liking it. However, the over-arching online and offline rhetoric from the pagan community is that there are many ways to be Witch, and everyone is entitled to be authentic to themselves and have slightly different belief systems and praxis. As Berger and Ezzy identified with their interviews of 90 teenage witches; "As there is no central bureaucracy or required dogma to determine authenticity, an individual's self-definition as a witch, Wiccan, Pagan or Neo-pagan is normally taken as face value" (2007: 25). Examples of how witches practice and share knowledge is explored in more detail in chapter six within this thesis.

4.4.2 Supernatural Energies and Witchcraft

Many online witches stated that they worked with and felt energies and this idea was reflected in the Life History Narrative interviews; "I believe there is energy out there, I mean if you look at the law of the conservation of energy it is there." (Felicity). The participants noted that energies were manifested through colours, auras, spirits, angels, feelings, sound or vibrations; "I started having tingling in my hands" (Sally). Penny believed that Witchcraft was "all down to energies" and Lexie felt that that

negative energy was manifesting through her ex-husband's aggressive behaviour and so she regularly cleansed the house with sage and sound.

All 13 Life History Narrative witches acknowledged that working with energies was empowering. All felt that they had agency in their lives even when they had difficult times because of their personal craft. They used their identity as a witch and the tools of Witchcraft to take control of situations and change them for their advantage.

"I've done a spell to bring some money to me because after the crash I had a lot of bills to pay out" (Sally)

"I got into cosmic ordering… So, over the years crappy things have happened to me… I chose not to let it consume me. Near water I can cleanse myself" (Penny)

"I love the idea of a guardian angel and always someone is looking over your shoulder. I use the energy to help me." (Kelly)

"I have lots of anxiety stuff so if I feel anxious or a bit low, I like to play with this [showing crystal]" (Grace)

Berger and Ezzy (2007: 229-231) suggest that there are four main reasons for a person to have an interest in witches and Witchcraft. The third reason is "empowerment of the self" (2007: 230) which was evident in the Life History Narrative interviews and within social networking spaces. Social networking posts suggested a person felt they gained agency through conducting Witchcraft. Furthermore, Witchcraft was appealing (specifically to women) because rituals emphasised the Goddess rather than the God, thereby appealing to a feminist

mindset. Becoming Witch and reclaiming the term Witch therefore was an active stance against patriarchy.

Tanya's Life History Narrative however, noted that the use of the term Witch was not an act of feminism because "we haven't reclaimed it! If you have an argument with a man…and sometimes with a woman, they may call you a 'bloody witch'…so it's still quite a negative word". She believed it was the ritual and practice that was empowering the witch not the word Witch. She felt that the term Witch was simply a representation of that empowerment.

4.4.3 Prophecy and Prophetic Dreams

To conclude this occult section, four of the Life History Narrative participants acknowledged a sixth sense, an intuition, that occasionally revealed a prophecy or a message from a spirit-guide or someone deceased. This often happened through a feeling or a dream. Each of the four Life History witches told this narrative as if it was a natural part of their identity and accepted the phenomena as ordinary. They did not note it as an occult practice and did not see it as part of the usual practice of Witchcraft. They acknowledged that not every witch has psychic abilities. They acknowledged that the paranormal was part of their personal journey into accepting that they were becoming Witch. Again, this is akin to the Berger and Ezzy's (2007) conclusions about teenage witches within their study. The witches "were intrigued by alternative realities" and the occult and this led them to explore Witchcraft (Berger and Ezzy, 2007: 230).

"I was brought up with… prophetic dreams, so I see things before they happen" (Mike)

"I have a dream of something and say Oh that wasn't good. But I don't know the significance until something happens and then I'll go oh!" (Grace)

"My first experience that I can remember… I looked to my brother and said has grandpa died, and he says no and then all of a sudden, we heard a loud speaker! It was calling for me to come to the security office and he told me my grandpa had died… This is my first spirit memory" (Lexie)

"I could be talking to someone like yourself and a name would come in my head and that name would keep nagging and nagging and nagging until I say do you know anyone called Simon for instance" (Penny)

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter I have explored the themes raised in the Life History Narrative interviews and the online postings of witches. I have discussed how the journey of becoming Witch is influenced by the choice of names, authenticity, feminist principles and the occult.

First this chapter noted that a self-proclaimed witch often used an adjective to distinguish the type of practice that they undertook. They self-identified as Green Witch, Solitary Witch, Druid Witch, Buddhist Witch, Dianic Witch, Spiritual Witch, Nature Witch, White Witch and Wiccan Witch. The adjective qualifies the Witch identity and an individual presented themselves as becoming more than Witch. This suggested therefore that Witch was more than the stereotype that was presented in popular culture and media.

One reason the witches included an adjective was because of the negative connotations associated with the term thus including a descriptor was a form of activist feminism. The individuals reclaimed the concept of Witch (and in some cases other terminology associated with it such as crone or hag), to become empowered and stop what they considered to be the disempowerment of women in a patriarchal society. This sentiment was also recognised within social networking spaces, which became safe spaces for the exploration of Witch identities. Witches played with various terminology and memes within online posts and through various online and offline encounters with others. Individuals explored various names and images of Witch to develop an authentic self.

Secondly, I have presented Witchcraft as innate in every witch. When Witch is actively acknowledged or awakened then Witch becomings happen. This was presented online and offline through a sense of 'coming home'. Self-identifying as Witch and finding out about The Craft (sometimes with others or alone) helped the Life History Narrative witches to discover the 'real me'. Online and offline, witches noted that they always had an affinity to nature and the earth and felt the need to express this in a physical way. This developed into ritual or/and spell work with herbs, essential oils, crystals, animals and the moon cycle for example. This led, for many, into acknowledging the triple Goddess of Maiden, Mother and Crone, and active worship of a specific goddess who represented one of the stages of Woman. The online community and the Life History Narrative witches understood that a goddess would reveal herself to the witch (rather than be chosen by the witch) but often the alliance to a goddess would change throughout the stages of someone's life

or would become part of a pantheon. Therefore, the path to becoming Witch frequently changed as a result of assimilating experiences and encounters that altered a witch's original idea or mindset.

Finally, this chapter has discussed how witches explored and connected with energies that were unseen or not felt by most of society. They worked with the occult and were comfortable talking about personal experiences with ghosts, fae, intuition, prophetic dreams, spirit guides, reiki, tarot, dowsing, pendulum, runes and energies. The discussion has acknowledged that all witches were aware of various types of spiritual and paranormal energies and used them in their personal craft. The occult was another aspect to confirming Witch and creating a Witch identity.

Bauman (2007) suggests that modernity is ever changing and in the age of the Internet, scholars need to rethink the use of the terms modern and postmodern. He prefers the term 'liquid modern life' (2007: 5) to postmodernism and says we are naturally living in fluid times. There are no clear boundaries, and this may be why people choose to explore and express their religiosity online. Technology has enabled the freedom of ideas, lifestyles and locations. Therefore, there is not one agreed way to become Witch.

Veidlinger's (2011) research concurs with Bauman for after having observed over three million user profiles on various sites, he concluded that many of them explored personal identities by individuals making connections with Buddhist principles and adapting them to suit their personalities, lifestyles and ideas. He argued that Buddhist identity was formed and reformed on social networking sites and that the platforms

enabled the sharing of knowledge, which in turn would affect personal attitudes related to the self. The formation of the self therefore was fluid and individuals frequently changed their identities because of the experiences and encounters they had. This has been evident with the Life History Narrative witches and online cyber-witches that I have explored within this chapter.

The next two chapters Claiming Witch and Performing Witch further support the findings discussed in this section of this thesis and aims to extend the narrative of how a person confirms their faith identity within social networking spaces.

Chapter Five: Claiming Witch

"It does put you out there, not necessarily as an authority but as a resource"
(Mike)

"I wanted tradition. I wanted something that had gone back through people before me rather than something I was making up myself as I went along"
(Sienna)

This second data chapter explores non-normative ideas of faith and how Witch interacts with Christianity in particular, but religion in general, to validate a witch's claim to becoming Witch. So far, this thesis has explored literature and data about how Witch is described by society both online and offline and how individuals use the stereotypes and identities to confirm and create their own authentic self. This chapter adds to this discussion but furthers it to analyse how individuals claim what it is to be Witch and evaluates the claims to Witch heritage.

As has been previously noted in chapter two and in the introduction but pertinent to reinforce at this stage in the thesis, there is a white British demographic with the Life History Narrative witches and a weighting of 13 to two in favour of women. This weighting is not unusual in Witchcraft and akin to other studies of witches (see for example Hutton, 1999; Berger and Ezzy, 2014; Alder, 1986; Lurhman, 2001). Most of the online data for this thesis therefore and the Life History Narrative data reflects a white Western perspective on witches. The social networking postings that are represented are mainly from America and Britain.

Asian or African Witchcraft is not explored in this thesis because my intention was to collect online data that had a similar form of Witchcraft to the participants within

the Life History Narrative interviews. Thus, I felt that the online data needed to reflect the same ethnicities. Moreover, focusing on a specific gender was not the motivation for this study because a gendered witch identity was not a significant theme that had been raised in the data. However, the feminine and female is acknowledged when I explore feminist Witchcraft (Pearson, 2010) because the participants discuss feminist principles within the data (see chapter four for discussion in this area).

On occasion however, there were Instagram posts from non-white, Western witches such as thehoodwitch and autumn_pheonix1 or there was a post that contained an image that depicted a non-white witch. For example, Pinterest image 1 depicts an illustration of a female witch working potions, and Instagram image 2 notes a black and Mexican heritage. The images are useful examples for the discussion about themes of heritage, learning or identity, however, in the main, most posts within this thesis are from white American or white British witches or represent Witch as having a white Western heritage, as is exemplified in image 3.

Occasionally, a witch will use the social networking platform to protest memes that have a white lens of Witch, as is shown in the Pinterest example image 2. Yet many posts represent a popularist witchcraft (Ezzy, 2003a) as depicted in image 4 that may be considered by some insincere to the heritage of Witchcraft and represents a new age consumerist view of Witch that is not to be taken too seriously (Coco and Woodward, 2007). The posts contain merchandise, objects and a stylised view of what Witchcraft is.

Moving on to the main themes within this chapter. The first theme is related to self-study and group study. Ten of the Life History Narrative witches in this study had a university degree or were undertaking an undergraduate degree at the time of the interview. Four participants had postgraduate degrees. Berger and Ezzy (2007) argue that Western Paganism does not necessarily attract university-educated individuals but does encourage all Pagans to engage with study. They noticed that all participants in their study of teenage witches in America, Britain and Australia had a questioning approach to praxis hence self-study was the essential part of their Witch identities rather than formal qualifications (2007: 35). The data for this thesis had a similar finding. Mike said that to become Witch a person needed to "learn more and carry on and learn more", and Ellie stated, "You never stop because there is always something else that comes around to make you evolve." All the 13 participants were fully engaged in extensive self-study and on occasion, group study.

The second theme in this chapter analyses how self and group study has been an enabler for individuals to feel that they have become an authority on Paganism, witches and Witchcraft and therefore they have taught third parties. This teaching was both online and offline. The third theme in this chapter discusses the heritage of witches and examines how at times religious language and doctrine has been used to explain Witch becomings. The chapter ends with discussion about collective and personal histories alongside the concept of othering.

5.1 Communities of Practice: Self study and Group Study

The data noted that it is common for witches to engage in self-study to learn about Witchcraft. Seven Life History Narrative participants engaged with group study at

some time in their Witch becomings and all 13 undertook personal individualised study. They noted that the purpose for study was self-development and improvement of practice.

"So, I had a chance to learn conceptually instead of within a context of previous generation or something like that... that opened my practice some more and is something I still use" (Mike)

"Self-development is often about making my life what I want it to be. That isn't necessarily about spells and getting rich quicker" (Tanya)

Personal spiritual development is a key component of Witchcraft (Hutton, 2014: 67) furthermore, the exploration of alternative pathways and spiritualities are conditions of late modernity (Hope and Jones, 2006). Indeed the "reflexive individualism" (Hope and Jones, 2006: 344) of cyber-witches and the witches in the Life History Narrative interviews demonstrated elements of epistemological individualism so that they discovered their own personal truths in relation to belief systems and Witch. Their self-study provided them with a personal dogma.

Tanya also suggested that "one of the things you can do to improve your knowledge is by sharing it with others" and so she decided to learn with others. Specifically, she worked with a magician and joined a community of Welsh Druids. This was so that she could develop her own practice and sense of identity. Furthermore, Holly said that she wanted to "build up this community but also one that is teaching you new stuff". Hence at times, community learning was promoted by witches to develop a sense of belonging. Even when a witch was a solitary practitioner, they learned The Craft with others. Occasionally the learning happened offline in small groups and at other times within online chat rooms and social networking spaces. The information

they gleaned from personal study and group study merged and became the foundation for their praxis.

"[chat rooms] allowed me to ask things and because they were anonymous at the time and under a pseudonym they were perfectly happy to tell you everything" (Mike)

"Pagans share e-books a lot because a lot of what you have to do is self-study in Paganism. You have to kind of source the material and there is no-one there to kind of give you a reading list… a lot if it is kind of sourcing around resources…and when I was younger that's what we did, we shared the books… this is kind of the modern equivalence of that so we share this e-book then talk about it." (Jenny)

David was strident about sharing knowledge and stated that "giving information, all this knowledge, it should be out there". Hence David avidly shared many images, ideas, resources, pictures, texts and ritual on a daily basis, mainly through Facebook. Social networking spaces such as Facebook and specific pagan blogs or websites host a selection of shared learning opportunities and advice; some practical and some more spiritual, for example Witchipedia (http://www.witchipedia.com). An example of responses to a question on Witchipedia, are evidenced images 5 and 6.

The posts David and others shared on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest demonstrated that there were many ways to practice Witchcraft. Having different methods for conducting ritual for example was an accepted understanding of all witches as exemplified by Jenny, "When you ask other Pagans the definition of things, they are all going to give you something different". Witches also acknowledged the intention to gain knowledge was for personal development rather than wanting to create a new pagan movement. Tanya noted that she started to

research because she wanted to remove what she felt was the forced acceptance of a belief system that she had experienced from childhood:

"I tried to debunk much of my indoctrination as I possibly could, so I read huge amounts... looking at the Gnostic gospels. I spent several years basically pulling apart Christianity and still found there was worth within the beliefs: Having a belief structure [was useful] but didn't know where to go from there" (Tanya)

Sienna, Grace and Kellie researched witches and paganisms within social networking spaces to learn how other people did things so that they could adapt their own practice or gain ideas, "It's not necessarily that I want to copy" (Sienna). The Life History Narrative witches noted that when they were online, they enjoyed searching out people who could provide information of interest and learning as a community. They said they went online because they did not have a local place to share knowledge. The social networking spaces therefore became useful places to explore difference and discuss non-normative practices.

Furthermore, for some individuals, the online place became a sacred space (rather than a communication tool) where spiritual energy could be raised (Klassen, 2002: 53) and the online platforms enabled epistemology and pagan ontologies. It is evident therefore that social networking spaces became plateaus for the witches that facilitated rhizomatic behaviours and the creation of learning communities. Coco (2008: 513) argues that "meaning is derived from interactions with others who by their very presence, online or offline, define places of association". Suggesting therefore that online spaces become meaningful to users because of the social attachments that are created. Consequently, "meaning is embodied" (ibid) within the space. The online place provides conceptual space for becomings (Tuan, 1977).

Additionally, it is human nature to be attracted to groups of like-minded people and share ideas and Bauman (2000) notes this as mixophilia. If this is not possible offline due to distance, then online becomes a solution. Often an individual may not have a pagan community local to them. Tanya and Jenny noted that they travelled over 50 miles, sometimes twice a month, to be part of a coven or take part in a pagan moot. They stated that travelling such distances was common amongst dedicated witches. Travelling distances required devotion and "requires a commitment: It is not just the case of turning up" (Jenny). Thus, with the accessibility of web platforms encouraging interaction, it seemed a natural progression to use the space as a place for pagan moots and learning.

Bauman (2007: 81) argues, "it is around places that human experience tends to be formed and gleaned, that life-sharing is attempted to be managed, that life meanings are conceived, absorbed and negotiated". Thus, witches need to meet other witches (offline and online) and learn about The Craft together to become the witch they wish to be. According to Heckert (2010) negotiation and sharing narratives encourages becomings of self and similarly Taylor (2006) suggests that talk enables the construction and reconstruction of identities. Furthermore Coco (2008) argues that discussing and sharing ritual, ideas and beliefs is essential for the process of becomings and as Klassen argues these witches are "not merely using the Internet to find out about their Craft; they are being witches online" (2002: 61).

Similar to the considerations of Hecket (2010), Taylor (2006), Coco (2008) and Klassen (2002), I discovered that all the witches within my study considered learning and Witch identities to be closely connected. Whilst online, witches were both Witch

and Learner. Their Witch identities were reflected through postings that included images that depicted the various concepts that constructed their Witch identity. For example, images 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 all note a witch identity as having been created from experiences with books, reading, study, moon, candles, cat, potions and magic. It was interesting to acknowledge that even if they had been practicing for over 10 years, the Life History participants all saw themselves as apprentice-Witch. Such posts are examples of multiphrenic self (Gergen, 1991: 76) and polyphonic bricolage (Schmidt, 2003: 10), which has been discussed in chapter three.

5.1.1. Ways of Researching about Witchcraft and Witches

According to the Life History Narrative interviews, there was a personal preference of how a witch engaged with research. The choice of using online or offline methods to learn about witches and Witchcraft was dependent on the personal mindset of each witch. All witches used texts to enable them to learn about Witchcraft, yet Kellie, Grace, Ellie and Holly had more of a disposition to blend learning through online forums with offline textbooks. These witches were aged between their early to mid-twenties and "mostly did research on the internet" (Holly).

There is an assumption that in 21st century technology will replace book learning but that did not seem to be the case within the Life History Narrative interviews. The participants blended methods to gather and created knowledge. They read library books and purchased textbooks that discussed general Witchcraft by authors such as Scott Cunningham and Doreen Valiente.[62]

"I went to the library, there wasn't another way of doing it [study] there was bits of stuff on spirituality, different kinds of religions, that was what I was interested in" (Sienna)

"There used to be a wonderful occult bookshop... that was my first point of contact" (Tanya)

"I have got a book... something like 'The modern-day witchcraft' or something. And it gives you a detailed thing about not being what everyone thinks that it is. You can define it as you've said in multiple different ways." (Ellie)

"I started to get involved in the mechanics of it all... reading up a lot, Internet buying books." (Sally)

The Life History Narrative witches also attended moots, covens and bespoke lectures and appreciated "there's always different talks" (David). For example, a talk could explore herbal lore, candle magic, fae mythology or how to use a pendulum and dowsing rods. On occasion the Life History Narrative witches sought out an individual to learn from them about specific aspects of paganisms. For instance, Tanya decided to work with a magician and Jenny worked closely with her High Priestess.

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[62] Scott Cunningham was an American writer who produced many texts in the 1990s about solitary Wicca e.g. *Wicca a guide for the Solitary Practitioner* and was one of the first people who acknowledged that it is possible to be Pagan and a witch without a coven. Doreen Valiente wrote about Gardnerian Wicca and her texts explain much about Wiccan ritual According to her website http://www.doreenvaliente.com/#sthash.47iqprMX.dpbs (accessed 20.11.18) she is considered by many in the Pagan community to be one of the most influential woman in modern Witchcraft.

"When I went to coven the training was available and she'd give you the materials and teach you but even then, it was 'go away and read this study'" (Jenny).

Although Tanya and Jenny worked closely with an experienced practitioner, they still acknowledged that the aim for learning was personal development and that the information provided by the significant other would not be given as a set dogma. The purpose of the learning was for the individual to become the witch they felt they should by exploring various ideas to discover their authentic self and their authentic Witch.

The focus of self-improvement through research and study enabled the 13 witches to develop a personalised learning approach that was relevant to them, and as Tanya noted "I would start scouting around for new ideas and keep building this self-growth and self-development". The personalised approach to faith and spirituality could explain Paganism's popularity and why it is considered to be a growing faith tradition in the West (Zilber, 2018). The focus of self-improvement is one of the reasons for a growth in alternative and new age spiritualities (Helas and Woodhead, 2004).

5.1.2 Learning Online

The focus of using books as a learning aid and personalised self-study is a strong online discourse. Yet what seems to be happening is that although textbooks are still an important aspect of study, witches used the online platforms to connect and learn about the pathways of Paganism through a community of practice. As is evident in image 12 by The Hidden Witch who gives advice to the community and denotes that

mistakes with practice is part of the process of being able to successfully work

Witchcraft. The online community was also important to the Life History Narrative witches,

"I started getting into Internet forums and stuff like that where you do start to meet people online. Learn a lot of stuff about that "(Holly)

"I tend to follow a lot of more personal blog type things of people who are "joining forums, discussion groups, hearing about different paths, Hermeneutic paths, solitary Wicca, Flemic magic. I looked at it and explored it and it started to become part of my life to the point that I suddenly went I think this actually might be something I agree with" (Tanya)

More, Sienna noted, "I like the community aspect. It's a huge study, people study all their lives" and it was the pull of learning with and from people rather than learning alone that encouraged her to go online. The platforms were plateaus for her to connect with others and join a rhizome of ideas because it contains various avenues to explore. Kelly explored hyperlinks in Pinterest and Instagram because they were "especially good for ideas for Hallowe'en altars" (Kelly).

Furthermore, Holly stated that she enjoyed the social networking spaces "because it's very interesting to see how these other people interact with this idea". She continues to note that

"It gives you a chance to see across the world and cultures and stuff ... Even in places like America which you think would be very similar to here... there's vastly different interpretations... there's lots of inspiration spells herbs and all sorts of stuff you know... it's a good resource I guess to have handy".

Therefore, the online platforms were used as hubs or plateaus to collect information (rather than provide information) and the individual would then choose a selection of

directions to gather information and ideas. The social networking space such as Instagram on Pinterest offered the potential to create a bricolage of a person's self-interest in relation to a topic, as is shown in the Instagram image 13 which is a screen shot of a home page. The process of collecting information becomes a map of ideas that is then an example of Rhizome Theory.[63]

5.1.3 Learning from Different Paths

Another interesting point of reflection about the engagement of learning is that to become Witch, an individual will amalgamate a selection of pathways to create their own personal belief system. This means that what they chose to learn about was much broader than exploring the basics of becoming a witch.

"So, I read the Bible, all of it! Cover to cover... I read about a half of the Quran… From Bible to coven in 6 months" (Mike)

"I went to different classes that looked at spiritual enlightenment and things to do with the earth. Different subjects every week and they look at chakras. Chakra cleansing one week and the next they'd look at aromatherapy and the next, table tipping and psychic development." (Sienna)

As previously noted, part of the reason they chose to look at a variety of faiths in depth was to dismiss myth or unravel previously held truths that they were unsure of: "I started thinking well hang on a minute this religion malarkey. "No way is one person, one god responsible for us. You know there is more to it" (Penny), and as Tanya noted earlier in this chapter, some individuals wanted to debunk childhood indoctrination. Another reason for engaging with online research was because they

[63] Chapter two explores Rhizome Theory in more detail

felt spiritually lost and was looking for something that was different to what they were used to. They were looking for something that could fill a spiritual void or support a sense of wellbeing (Barkin, Millar and Luthar, 2015). More, they were looking for a spirituality that chimed with their own personal ideas, personality and belief systems.

"I've always been in reading up since about 25, reading up on spells and stuff like that I think my turning point was when my boyfriend left... when you're at your lowest, you sort of turn to something. Some people turn to religion, but I got more involved into the paranormal." (Sally)

"I've always been interested in yoga and there is spiritual side to yoga" (Sienna)

Often online posts and blogs indicated that some witches were blending postmodern spiritualities and practices to create their own form of spirituality and Witchcraft. For instance, a witch may blend yoga practices with ritual such as that is shown in image 14 which depicts a hare, which some Pagans believe is a totem for a witch, doing Yoga. The yoga Sun Salutation however has morphed into the cycle of the moon and therefore is an example of "recopaganism" (York, 2003: 60-61) where an old tradition is re-formed. This recopaganism, demonstrates the multiplicitous rhizomatic nature of Witch identity formation. Furthermore, it also shows acceptance within the pagan community for alternative ideas. Spiritualities are not meant to stay stagnant as is evidenced in the blog and tweet from @PatheosPagan which is image 15. Examples images 14 and 15 support the evolutionary nature of becoming Witch.

To briefly summarise to this point, becoming Witch is a process of self-development through solitary study, group study and through learning with individuals both online

and offline. Such learning is an example of mycelial theory[64] and is part of the theoretical framework of this thesis. Each of the 13 Life History Narrative witches create their own personalised form of Paganism and what it means to be Witch. They have a connection to a branch of Paganism for example Wicca or Druid and link to other aspects of Witchcraft. Life History Narrative witches develop their own personalised interpretation of Witch spirituality. Hence, like fungi such as a mushroom, the individual creates personalised offshoots that directly link to the original idea (thus creating a rhizome) and then create a new and evolved aspect of Witch (mycelium). The mycelial fungi are a healthy aspect of the colony. The mycelium is an important part of the source plant because it provides nutrients and enables the plant to evolve. Hence, the personal development of witches is considered healthy by the people who are part of the faith (the colony) and their becomings are a natural part of being a witch.

5.2 Authority

The second theme to explore in this chapter is the idea of authority. Religions such as the Abrahamic faiths have a set of dogma and scriptures that are considered to have an authority because of the structure and guidance from faith leaders who head the faith. Harvey notes that to understand pagan authority it may be useful to compare with sources of authority such as deities from monotheistic religions (1997: 212). He further argues that it is the relationships that are the main foundation of authority in Paganism and relationships form who people are (1997: 214). In Paganism however, knowledge about Witchcraft is created through personal study rather than an

[64] Chapter two explores Rhizome-Mycelium Theory as the theoretical framework for this thesis.

institution and “you build it [knowledge] up yourself” (Jenny) but Jenny also noted that there is a potential problem with this method. She explained, as did Tanya, that Witchcraft can be dangerous especially if someone is unsure of what they are doing. Consequently, someone could be online and offering harmful advice. Therefore, Tanya and Jenny often decided to seek advice and learn the basics with another more experienced person during their becomings.

Cowan (2005) acknowledges that claiming online authority has the potential for harm. Some may dominate the social networking space and thus may not accept or may not be challenged for inaccuracies in their posts or unsubstantiated claims to legitimate pagan practice (2005: 167, 168). For instance, someone could be an administrator for a Facebook group and as a result feel they have ownership and authority over the site. They therefore share personal ideas and practice that could be inaccurate. They present themselves as having authority mainly because of the stakeholder position. There is an assumption that they know more than the rest of the group because they initiated it.

Seven of the 13 Life History Narrative witches offered training and shared their knowledge. They saw themselves as an authority on their practice. Three of the participants had not had formal training with a high priestess in the Craft and had learned Witchcraft from self-study (much of that online). They felt confident that they could pass on their knowledge of Witchcraft and give guidance to others.

“I sort of signed myself up as a mentor... I feel I am that stage you know. I’m running the society and stuff and I have something to offer and you just like put on a profile, you submit you know. I like it [being a mentor] it feels similar role to what I

do already... obviously it can be a little difficult because people are coming from so many different paths" (Holly)

"I run a podcast of tree folk lore... doing about an hour per tree or genus... ancestral uses herbal lore and some modern-day contemporary Witchcraft" (Mike)

Cowan posits that sharing online is a repetition of what a person has read rather than authentic pagan practice. Yet it is possibly also an example of an "online innovator of modern pagan identity" (Cowan, 2005: 171). Indeed, the YouTube and Instagram accounts of Harmony Nice[65] are examples of Cowan's innovator who "function as online authorities but also seek to create new resources which may then be appropriated and extended by the open source culture of modern Paganism" (Cowan, 2005: 171).

There are online opportunities within social networking spaces that offer training for witches. Some of the training is provided by established organisations such as The Pagan Federation and others are through social networking spaces such as YouTube, where individual share their personal knowledge of the Craft. One example is ThePunkwitch25. On the one hand individuals have authority because they feel they have had enough experience and self-study to become an expert in the field and claim Witch. Yet on the other hand, there is limited authority because the knowledge has not been measured by an officiate (as it would with the Church in Christianity for example) because it is self-taught, or the witch has not been practicing for long i.e.

[65] Harmony Nice has been discussed in chapter four and is a modern self-identified Wiccan witch who has an extensive number of followers. She published a book in 2018 that is a basic guide to Wicca and she is considered by online community as an authority of the Wiccan path because of the book and the networking within her social networking spaces.

less than four years. Hence what the person is teaching could be inaccurate and could potentially cause conflict (Cowan, 2005).

Nevertheless, many of the individuals who teach their craft online, have huge numbers of followers and what is possibly more important to consider for this study, is not the accuracy of the shared content, but the fluid innovation of what Witch is. Therefore, what is an authentic pagan truth is not significant to becoming Witch because, if there are enough people agreeing or following an online witch, it is the personal interpretation of Witchcraft that is the essential element and not whether it is accurate or not. The online plateau supports the creation of another pagan path, which then demonstrates becoming Witch.

Furthermore, the individual's representation of Witch and Witchcraft also becomes an excellent example of Rhizome-Mycelium Theory and Cowan's concept of an innovator (2005: 171). Images 16, 17 and 18 are screenshots of blogs and posts advertising various online courses. Also, Wiccan Witch Harmony Nice (9th September 2018) frequently has a question and answer session within her YouTube channel which demonstrates that users of the social media see her as an authority on Witchcraft.

5.2.1 The Witch with Authority

Having the confidence to share praxis is a theme throughout the life History Narratives and some of the participants acknowledged that they did not feel ready to share what they knew.

"I'm no better than anybody else because everyone has got knowledge. They just have to tap into it. We're no different from anybody. I don't think I'm any superior anyone else" (Penny)

Out of all 13 participants, Sienna had the most self-doubt regarding her knowledge and so she did not post ideas online. She said that she mainly lurked. Cowan (2005) and Kozinets (2010: 33, 34) both argue that lurking demonstrates that the Internet creates weak ties, and this can lead to a lack of commitment. An individual is less likely to become a stakeholder in a community if they do not feel they belong and thus have agency to share ideas and opinions. This was also a sentiment raised by the Life History witches in relation to engaging with online communities. Penny noted how she addressed people online when they stated that their praxis was the only way of understanding and conducting Witchcraft.

"Because people put others down 'well I do such a thing and you're doing it wrong'. You can't do it wrong 'cause whatever you do for yourself is right. There is no wrong way or right what about this. And that's when I end up talking and say, 'oh hang on a minute, we don't work like this'... just coz you have been to Salem doesn't mean you know better than me"

"I think it's like a teacher isn't it. If you're a good teacher, you don't say I've mastered it… If I had the information and I was convinced I was right then I would post in blogs and stuff… I feel 'who am I to do that? I'm learning!' I'm very much a student at the moment" (Sienna)

Strong ties (Kozinets, 2010) encourage a sense of belonging but for some it will more likely occur offline such as it did with Sienna. Yet, it is the mindset rather than the experience of the individual that enables them to consider themselves enough of

an authority so that they can take a lead. Sienna was experienced with the occult but lacked self-belief and hence felt she lacked authority.

"I have been asked to lead a salt circle and I said no 'cause it's a lot of responsibility and it has power. You need to know what you are doing to lead those sort of things" (Sienna)

However, 10 of the Life History Narrative witches felt that sharing knowledge was part of what it meant to be a witch and it was the experiences that enabled the witches to feel that they had the authority to advise and teach others about their craft.

"I can do psychic reading... I teach classes on pendulums. I can teach classes that help people tap into their own intuition" (Lexie)

"With the Internet there been lots more and I send out lots of links and these other groups and get things done" (David)

Tanya had over 20 years Witchcraft experience and engaged in extensive study during this time. She used the length of time as a witch to claim her authority, which was also a similar finding to Cowan's research (2005). Tanya felt her experience gained her the authority to share her knowledge through books, online forums and offline courses.

"I used to be involved with a group called ***. We started 7 years ago with the Rite of the Sacred Fires which was a ritual we put on a Facebook page for anyone who worked with or worshiped the goddess Hecate" (Tanya)

"I'm going to help facilitate a yearly training course with a new initiate...they [Druid Order] do a couple of rituals every year" (Tanya)

"I'm writing another book at the moment. I'm fascinated with folk lore and mythology" (Tanya)

However, Tanya, Jenny and Mike were concerned about pagan authority and noted that without a strong commitment, extensive learning (with others and alone) and good understanding of various approaches to practicing the Craft then authority could be questioned. Therefore, it would be difficult to decipher whether what was presented online was authentic or not. “It’s too easy to blag what they say they’re doing and what they’re really doing” (Tanya). Hence, most participants suggested that any form of teaching should be in an advisory capacity rather than didactic; “I tell them more what they could do not should” (Mike) thus allowing the flexibility to adapt and not be made accountable for passing on a spell that may not work for example.

5.2.2 Others Acknowledge Witch Authority

The idea that the number of followers a witch may have online is possibly an indication of authority i.e. the larger the number of followers, the more authority one is perceived to have by the online community is an interesting concept. Yet popularity may be because of the algorithm of the social media platform rather than the witch themselves. The algorithm encourages memes and posts to go viral and consequently the originator of that post gain attention (Campbell, 2018).

It is therefore interesting to consider how Witch authority is established within the community. Having large numbers of online followers demonstrates that what an individual promotes online, resonates to many others. The person is an authority and influencer because of the number of followers and the use of social media. Furthermore, operant conditioning (McSweeney and Murphy, 2014) ensures that the

person who is seen an authority by others, eventually accepts this identity and consequently presents themselves as an authority. They present what it means to be a witch to the social media world. They begin to view themselves as an authoritative voice about Witchcraft and this becomes part of their self-concept.

The witches in the Life History Narrative interviews acknowledged that, on occasion other people would give them the position of being an authority in Witchcraft. Often non-witches would approach them for Occult advice. For example, Holly and Felicity were both approached online and offline to conduct bespoke ritual.

"[they will ask] 'I've just moved to a new house and will you come around and cleanse it?'... little things [such as] 'will you say something – my dog's passed away' or whatever – 'can you do something spiritual?' So, they will ask for advice like that. But not many will ask for the herbal remedy" (Felicity).

Moreover, Mike noted that he became more popular within the pagan community after speaking at events and Moots about his praxis "I get people randomly dropping me things [via social media] and I get that because I've been speaking these past nine months and I'm relatively well known so people drop me a message" (Mike). It was not Mike's original intention when he started becoming a witch to share advice and knowledge, but he found that he was singled out as a more knowledgeable other and thus asked to share his expertise.

"I was working with two people identified as witches who were doing the psychic development. A few people joined the group late and they turned to me and said do you want to bring them up to speed? And I said I'm not the teacher! And so, it slowly came I was teaching half of it and giving other options." (Mike)

"So, the organiser of that group... swung by my garden centre... not Pagan... an Animist; in some ways a Pantheist. He was looking for me to do a talk about trees, tree folk lore and I said actually that's the thing I know a lot about... I delivered a three and a half hour talk about I think 15 trees at a time... I've been speaking about tree folklore ever since" (Mike).

Yet what is different between the online community and the Life History Narrative witches is that the Life History Narrative witches used Facebook and Instagram as a mode to develop shared epistemologies rather than as a platform to present their own ideas. As Sienna noted, sharing knowledge is "kind of trading information in those sort of ways" and Felicity said, "I think using social media as an additional tool is very worthwhile to have maybe a private Facebook group discussing things". The witches believed that knowledge about Witchcraft should be shared, recreated and developed within an open source networked environment.

The dataset for this thesis noted that some cyber-witches within social networking spaces had large numbers of followers and became a celebrity. They used the platforms to promote themselves through popularist witchcraft (Ezzy, 2003a). Garcia-Rapp (2017) notes that becoming a celebrity is mediated through the connections with the online community and it is enabled through the self-promoting social networking spaces such as YouTube and Instagram: They become "Instafamous" (Boermann, 2020: 199). Exploring the beauty industry and beauty gurus,[66] Garcia-Rapp (2017) notes that sharing videos that contain personal information such as presenting everyday activities along with self-branding, creates

[66] Self-identified Wiccan witch *Harmony Nice* started her profile with make up tutorials and then developed to include Witchcraft. She now offers both beauty, mental health advice and Wicca

confidence in a person and accordingly they gain influential status due to the intimacy they have created with viewers. An example of intimacy can be seen in Instagram image 19 by gardianofthgoddess. The post gained 115 likes.

Ward (2017) furthers the idea of self-branding and notes that celebrity is mediated through social networking and the parasocial relationships that are formed within them. He argues that the intimacy offered by celebrity creates an illusionary experience for the fan and a "cult of celebrity" (Ward, 2017: 315). The fan believes that there is a reciprocal intimacy, and this is cultivated by the celebrity hence there forms a "new kind of cultic worship where celebrities take on a shamanic character in media representations… replacing traditional religious sources of identity and authority" (2017: 314, 315). Therefore, there is potential for a "new kind of religion" (ibid) which is evidence of Rhizome-Mycelium Theory.

The danger however is that the individual has a vast number of followers and becomes so popular that they lose intimacy with the online community thus loses their authenticity. To maintain authenticity therefore, the online celebrity would require understanding about group norms for example they may need to create a boundary of expectations and be aware of the potential of losing their status.

Yet because celebrity is organic and changes with the needs of a community (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). Potentially a cyber-witch could become 'Celebrity'. Furthermore, the rhizomatic becomings could establish a new branch of Paganism, which would adhere to Rhizome-Mycelium Theory. Yet whether celebrity-witch becomings will continue and form new faith movements within Paganism is likely to

be dependent on the performance of authenticity that constantly needs reinforcing online (Marwick and Boyd, 2011).

Ward (2017) argues however that worshiping celebrity is not necessarily evidence of a new religion. Moreover, it is parareligion, with parallels between the celebrity culture and an established religion such as Christianity. Through networks and social media platforms, something akin to religious thought and practice is emerging. Hence social networking spaces support the creation of Celebrity-witch and the users confirm what that religious celebrity means for them personally. The Celebrity-witch therefore is "the focus for… personal engagement with the self" (Ward, 2017: 318). Harmony Nice www.harmonynice.co.uk[67] is an example of a Celebrity-witch. She promotes intimacy through personal stories about her mental wellbeing and belief systems and consequently has over 40,000 followers. The comments that relate to her post welcome her intimacy and seem to value her honesty about her struggles with mental health.

5.2.3 Perceived Issues with Authority

Some of the Life history Narrative witches did not appreciate the development of popularist Witchcraft as is noted below with Tanya:

"We saw it happening years back in the early noughties and we called them "wiki Wiccans" because, remember the wiki pages and everyone had to create one and put information in? And then certain people only seemed to exist in their wiki pages... I just don't want to be in with that group of people because they have a lot of knowledge but not a lot of experience." (Tanya)

[67] Harmony Nice is a good example of a new brand of Paganism and Witch, as has been noted previously within this chapter.

However, there was also a sentiment about praxis. There was an agreement amongst half of the Life History Narrative witches that a witch was someone who had theories about how to conduct Witchcraft and practiced it through ritual. The concern they raised was that 21st century witches (especially online) did not seem to become involved in the practical elements of ritual and they questioned whether consequently they could claim to be a witch.

"I've met and done public ritual with those who claim on the Internet to be these fabulous all seeing, all dancing, witches, Wiccans, Druids whatever you want to call them and yet you get them into a ritual environment, and they can't do anything. Because it's all book reading there is no practice" (Tanya)

"In terms of books you are still using someone else's knowledge" (Sienna)

However, as Penny noted in her Life History Narrative, there is "no wrong way" of being a witch and this is also a sentiment that was generally accepted within the online and offline Pagan community. The Pagan path was fluid and The Craft included a personal approach, hence the issues that some witches had with praxis, was not too worrisome when one was becoming Witch. It was agreed that any which way to Witch, was fine.

5.2.4 Sharing an Authority

The final concept to discuss in this section is the idea of sharing authorities. Many branches of Paganism are non-hierarchical and have a linear structure. Harvey notes that "Pagans are intolerant…cynical about leaders…Paganism encourages each individual and group to form their own identity in relation to their environment"

(1997: 213). Hence many of the Life History Narrative witches acknowledged that they shared their ideas with others but not as an authority but more for a community of practice.

"I did a couple of chatroom meditations where we sort of signed in and said what our intention was." (Tanya)

"My friend she does women's retreats, weekends and shamanic retreats. I'll put a lot of info on her page." (Felicity)

"It's basically pairing people up who are new to Paganism with people who are more experienced" (Holly)

"The websites that have got the interpretations [of tarot] they are slightly personal to the person who has wrote it." (Ellie)

Tanya, Mike, Jenny and Felicity used the social opportunities of online and offline moots and training events to co-create epistemologies and ontologies:

"There is the possibility of doing experimental magic with the Internet not just on the Internet" (Tanya)

"I started working with a psychic development group...who were doing things that only second degrees should do in Wicca" (Mike)

The content of the online posts varied. Tanya created and shared Sigils,[68] Mike offered podcasts, Jenny created a Facebook group which she considered to be a blog;

[68] A sigil is magical symbol that can be created for various reasons such as protection, love, success. It is part of spell work.

"I haven't got the time for blogs although that would be fab. In a way this Facebook page is like a mini-blog for me" and Felicity sold fairy gardens on a bespoke website. Comments, likes and sharing of posts validated the witch's authority to create a rhizome of ideas and learning.

Validation is presented through likes, loves, sharing and comments and this is evident in most social networking posts. However, the witches who responded to the posts may not have necessarily been validating the authority of the witch who submitted the original post. They may have been liking the post but it did not change them and so they never returned to that individual again. Nevertheless, they were affiliating with what the person was doing (Harvey, 1997: 213) and (as discussed earlier in this chapter) the message resonates with them in some way. This is exemplified in the amount of people sharing the Facebook posts in images 20 that was shared 503 times and had 753 likes, also with Facebook image 21 with 72 like and 31 shares. The reasoning behind someone liking or sharing a post however is unclear and so whether they are acknowledging the authority of the person behind the post or simply affiliating with a concept is still supposition on my part.

Nevertheless, at times it is possible to see from a post that someone values authenticity and sees the individual as having Witch authority. Evidence of this is contained in the three posts identified in images 22, 23 and Twitter image 24 which were posted by a self-identified witch, public speaker and author, Lisa Lister, who also has a brand name of *The Sassy She*. The posts are shared numerous times and the many comments underneath the Twitter and Instagram posts affirm the message within the post and the Witch authority that she presents.

5.3 Claiming Witch Heritage

The final section of this chapter discusses claims to the legitimacy of Witch as having an established faith-heritage. Many social media posts claimed a long Pagan history that pre-dated Christianity and thus the heritage validated and legitimised a person's status as Witch. The Life History Narrative interviews and some online posts indicated that some of the witches felt they were direct descendants to famous witches such as the Pendle witches or Salem witches as exemplified in image 25. Alternatively, some witches suggested they had roots with an established traditional heritage such as the gypsy communities.

"There is a rumour that we are related to the Pendle witches. How true that is I do not know…they are our roots. Without them we would be 'owt." (Penny)

"There's always been a bit of a little myth in the family...always been healing hands due to Romany heritage. More strictly speaking Diddquai heritage which means quarter black-blood: Black referring to purity in this case not a racial thing: well not in a black race as it is today" (Mike)

Furthermore, some of the witches in the online posts and during the Life History Narrative interviews linked their Witch heritage to more recent times and who they consider to be the founders of modern Witchcraft (Gardner, Valiente and Alexander). Image 26 is a screenshot of a Facebook page for the Doreen Valiente Foundation. Such posts give authority and enable witches to justify their interpretation of The Craft "So the coven is Gardnerian and has lineage to Doreen Valiente" (Jenny). Additionally, all the Life History Narrative participants accepted that modernisation meant that practice would evolve, and this was expected in Paganism.

Authentic pagan heritage is a contested area because there is discrepancy over whether Paganism is an ancient tradition or a construct of the 20th century (Hutton, 2017). Scholars such as Margaret Murray claimed that Paganism was a religion that dated to Palaeolithic times and Buckland agreed; suggesting that art from ancient civilizations that depicted pagan deities (such as the horned god) was evidence of early pagan practices. Buckland claimed that Paganism has existed for approximately 20,000 years (2014: 9). However, York (2003) states that Paganism has evolved from folk, animist and shamanistic cultures and thus the age of pagan practice is not easily identifiable. York divides contemporary Paganism into three categories: Geopaganism, Recopaganism, and Neopaganism (2003: 60-61)[69] suggesting therefore that pagan heritage is constantly in flux and has a fluid identity. This being the case, it would be difficult to track and identify with accuracy the age of pagan practice.

Hutton is a prolific writer about Pagan tradition. His text The Witch (2017), analyses the history of the Witchcraft trials and the concept of Witch around the world. He identifies the British witch as having a pre-Christian heritage with identities such as cunning and wise folk (2017: xi). In his conclusion, he categorizes Witch as a Magical Practitioner (2017: xi; 288) which links to the Satan-witch of the medieval ages and Witchcraft trials. Yet he also states that he prefers the term Service Magician because this means The Craft is used to help clients (rather than for selfish reasons), which can be for good or ill and is therefore not necessarily malevolent.

[69] Geopaganism: explores tacit cultural traditions such as ritualistic greetings and blessings)
Recopaganisms: relates to reviving traditions that may be in threat of dying out)
Neopagnism: links to the 8 Sabbats and festivals (York, 2003: 60-61).

Furthermore, Hutton argues that the modern construct of a green spiritual witch comes from a 'constellation… of religious traditions" rather than one lineage (2017: 287).

The heritage of Witch and Witchcraft therefore is deeply related to all religions and cultures pre and post Christianity. Hence, stating authority by claiming historical longevity is not necessarily helpful because Christianity and Paganism could be considered symbiotic and becoming Witch happens because of, not in-spite of Christianity. Indeed, as Hutton notes,

"What especially matters about the portrait of medieval and early modern culture…is that it lays an unusually heavy stress on the ability of commoners to develop new beliefs" (2017: 287).

5.3.1 Unbecoming to Become Witch

What is interesting to note is that seven of the 13 witches in the Life History Narrative interviews described their current identity through comparisons to Christianity and used religious language and experiences of religion. Indeed, some described their current Witch identity through deconstructing their previous identity which links to the idea of needing to unbecome an identity to create a new one (Greenough, 2018; Roger and O'Connor, 2017; Grosz, 2005). Pullen and Simpson argue that identity

> "is the identification of how we see ourselves and others in relation to being the same… also about difference – whom we are not the same as. The sense of self then, is about both who we are and who we are not." (2009: 61)

Hence the participants claimed their Witch identities through using comparisons to Christianity but also through using language that noted what they were not. For example, Grace used her early experiences of attending a Protestant school to reason why she chose to not continue that path;

"I went to church with school. My mum was never really religious. I remember being six or seven and thinking I don't understand why people believe that that's for real so as I was growing up it was not something I could believe what I was being taught. I didn't think there was A God." (Grace)

She also referred to Christian practise in favour of Paganism.

"Maybe it would be nice to go to a group kind of thing, but I think if it's organised, like a church thing. And that's my issue really, it would become a set of rules that I had to do and have this done by… I'll feel guilty. That's part of religion I don't want" (Grace)

Likewise, Jenny compared the practices of Christianity with Wicca:

"I'm comparing it to C.V. which is the only other thing I know, it's very passive. You turn up to the lessons and then you are involved. Whereas you'll never ever get away with that in a million years in Paganisms. You got to do the work yourself… If you are Christian, you'd go to Sunday school and they provide materials. And there would be a teacher. Not all pagans want to join a coven… Although moots are the closest aren't they. You can kinda say what do I do? Although they tend to be intimidating in a way that I think turning up at a church isn't." (Jenny)

The Life History Narrative participants used sameness and difference to explain their choice of spirituality and identity thus confirming Witch (Pullen et al, 2009). Although Mike was not a Christian, he decided to explore Christianity through

reading all the Hebrew Bible and used the messages contained to reflect on what he was doing as a witch and why. “One thing that did catch my eye in the Bible and sent a shiver down my spine was ‘the sin of Witchcraft is rebellion’ - 1 Samuel 15:23 - and I thought I’m not rebellious... well I am sinning if I am doing this... but I don’t think I am sinning”

Similarly, four of the other Life History Narrative witches did not have any affiliation to a specific faith tradition and described their childhood religiosity as atheist or non-religious. Yet the majority found that their childhood experiences affected their becoming Witch. Around the age of eight Sienna went to church on her own but felt that she was unable to explore what Christianity meant to her. She felt at the time that she did not have the agency to choose that path because the adults saw her as incompetent due to her young age. Over time Sienna discovered that Wicca valued the Maiden, hence she decided to explore this route instead because, although young, she felt her voice would be heard.

“I was under a lot of pressure from the adults at the Sunday school and what they would do at the school is they would do the sermon, (which was the bit I liked) and during the sermon the children would go to the Sunday school. But the bit I liked was the sermon” (Sienna)

“Sunday school was really frustrating for me because that’s not the bit I wanted to do and in the Sunday school you would sit with the other children and draw stories and pictures and things. And I wanted to listen to what the person was saying. So, I got really disillusioned with that in the end. I kind of felt quite excluded from it… I couldn’t see it [spirituality] coming into my life through Christianity” (Sienna)

Although from a Christian background, Penny experienced a selection of Christian

denominations.

“My mother was very religious...Whatever church open that day we went... So, I’ve been to Jehovah Witness, I’ve been to Methodist, I’ve been to Catholic... Spiritualist even!”

This was a similar experience to Felicity who came from a mixed Christian denominational family.

“I went to church as a child, my father was Catholic my mother Protestant probably, but it was Sunday school and stuff like that. But it wasn’t a big thing it wasn’t a major thing in our family... we probably went to a few different churches back then” (Felicity)

Early experiences of religion helped form the pagan faith philosophies of Sienna, Felicity, Lexie and Penny, which influenced how they wanted to behave as an adult. For example, they felt they had religion forced on them and wanted a faith that was more spiritually liberal and chose to amalgamate praxis to create a more personalised belief system.

“I’ve been baptised by full emersion... my children have never been to church I wouldn’t force a religion on them” (Penny)

“So, when I do pray to mother and father god, I pray to the angels, all of them I don’t want to leave anyone out. The ascending Masters; Holy Spirit; previous family members, and specifically I pray to Jesus, Mohammed and Buddha. These are energies I feel I want to bring in for myself, and you know peace, and then I also want to represent all cultures. I don’t want to be limiting this is the as the right way you know!” (Lexie)

“I’m a Christian but I’m also very, very in touch with Hindu deities and I do chant a lot and find great peace from that as well. So, I feel that you know, I am drawn there

too. I've got quite a few Krishna friends and I go to the Barjans and Pujas in *** and I was doing for many years. I also like Buddha. I didn't want to put a label on myself" (Felicity)

The above examples from Lexie and Felicity demonstrate an eclectic approach to religious experience. They have used a polyphonic bricolage (Schmidt, 2003: 10) to create Witch but the examples also demonstrate that within Paganism there are many ways to become Witch. Past religious experiences influenced becoming Witch because it forced the Life History Narrative witches to reflect on human and spiritual experiences. However, the reason behind an individual's choice to experiment with a variety of religious experiences to create a sense of self, and whether this experimentation was related to the mindset of an individual is still unanswered. Hence this may be a more beneficial focus in a future project.

5.3.2 Anti-Christian Sentiments

The Life History Narrative participants used Christian language to describe their position, and at times there was an underlying theme that was anti-Christian:

"Later in life I tried again to go to church but again I found it was very clicky" (Sienna)

"People are realising there is more to things...A lot of power has been taken away from the establishment...We no longer have to listen to - being told that we have to believe" (Penny)

Indeed, Mike stated "I'm not trying to be pushy and I'm not preaching like organised religion" which implies he compared his faith to other religions and felt Pagans did not force ideas onto others. This sentiment is not overtly anti-Christian, but his becoming Witch has created a hegemonic position that sees Christianity as oppressive to some of his freedoms.

David was vocal about being anti-Christian within the Life History interview and felt that by claiming Witch he was rebelling against religious norms.

"It's CCTV of the guy in the sky. Whatever you're doing Jesus is watching you and… If you do this - Oh the thunderbolt didn't come down from the sky!"

He felt that Christianity oppressed individuality and so decided to rebel and be different "they are against it, I am for it!" (David)

Anti-Christian messages, from the Pagan community are also noticeable within social networking spaces. Some online posts claimed Witch by declaiming Christianity. Examples are within image 27 that criticises the Virgin Mary; image 28 that ridicules reading the Bible; image 29 notes that the Christian God is not kind and image 30 that suggests Christmas is based in Pagan heritage. These screenshots include anti-Christian memes that also include potentially offensive images. Many posts note that Christianity is a myth.

Nevertheless, it seems that the witches who have anti-Christian attitudes or feel it necessary to use Christian theology to redefine and claim Witch heritage are possibly misunderstanding that the faith traditions are symbiotic and do not necessarily need polarised positions (Hutton, 2017). This awareness was however acknowledged by Holly and Tanya who said;

"You get influences in Primary School you sing hymns and do trips and stuff which is a bit weird maybe, but you know I guess it's all part of education if you like live in this country perhaps" (Holly)

“All the arguments of Patriarchal Christianity blah, blah, blah! All you do to jump the other side. You’re polarising the extreme... You’re jumping into the same path – on a parallel path” (Tanya)

Again, examples such as above suggest how self is constructed by comparisons of sameness and stances of difference (Pullen and Simpson, 2009) and both enable Witch becomings.

5.4 Othering

One of the possible reasons witches explore anti-Christian sentiments could be due to their early experiences of Christianity and feeling “quite excluded from it” (Sienna) hence, they became defensive because their experiences made them feel that the religion was anti-them. More, they felt othered by the Christian community and society in general as Grace noted; “People don’t mind about other religions but when you say Pagan or Wiccan... ooo weirdo!”. Indeed, Kelly felt the othering was because of a threat regarding the Satan-witch stereotype (Hutton, 2017; Hanegraaff, 1995) “Like the Pentagram, is a symbol of the Five elements for us, but for them it’s like a devil thing” (Kelly).

Many of the life History Narrative witches noted a sense of being different, being an outsider or non-normative. Mike particularly felt othered as he was growing up.

“At the age of about 10 I didn’t mind being on the outside. I didn’t try to fit in and certainly that didn’t change. I also didn’t have a desire to separate myself to be unique or rebellious…I was aware I was slightly different, seeing things, foraging. I wasn’t on the X-box, PS1…So, the other outcasts...They were the people I was talking to” (Mike)

Eventually Mike tried to feel accepted and "I developed a 'normal' persona. The mask developed" so that he was no longer othered. However, during his becoming Witch, Mike began to other himself; "so, vegetarianism points out you're a little bit odd in the eyes of other children... you take on that role of defending your belief or defending your principles" (Mike).

David also actively othered himself so that he celebrated the non-normative aspects of his identity and appreciated that he was "a bit strange"

"Rebelling, rebelling, rebelling and a bit more and then gradually at 16 you can see horror films and that mentions witches…I knew witches in London, and I knew I was selling books to people and there were witches around, but everyone is so 'oh but what if the church come round?' There is still all this secrecy" (David)

Othering is a phenomenon that seems to be growing within Islam, the media has some influence in creating anti-Islamic propaganda that can affect a person's view of the world and create a sense of othering (Silva, 2017). Creutz-Kamppi (2008) notes that otherness is strategic because it is related to power and argues that, "when the Other is being judged, the emphasis is on what differentiates instead of what connects" (2008: 297). However, power can be reclaimed. Badr (2004) noted that after 9/11 American Muslim women donned the Hijab as an outward protest to the xenophobia that they were encountering and so effectively othered themselves to actively raise awareness of the faith. Their self-othering after the terrorist attacks, encouraged discussions that led to a more balanced perception of what it meant to be Muslim. However, Badr also observed that some Muslim women decided to remove the veil so that they did not appear different due to the threat of

violence. The removing of the hijab became the result of symbolic violence but the wearing of it enabled the reclamation of power.

Self-othering was more prevalent online than with the Life History Narrative witches as evidenced in examples such as image 31, that depicts a statement of what a witch is and addresses how witches have been othered. Furthermore, image 32 shows a photograph with the meme we are the granddaughters you couldn't burn as a sign for self-othering, and image 33 requests less othering of witches and more understanding. Many of the online platforms were used to protest and reclaim heritage, status and legitimacy.

Occasionally comments were made about other witches that indicated an Othering that came from the inside of the group. The individual did not acknowledge other self-identified witches as an authentically witch hence, were not worthy to be considered a real witch:

"They can only do it online. That's because they are teenage witches and there are two things that I would extrapolate from that. I'd love to see what they're doing when they're 21 because what you would do at 15, and what you do at 21 would be vastly different. The other thing is that I'm not convinced if all our zealous witches will be practicing Witchcraft in a few years down the line… I don't think they even know what a witch is for them. A girl calls herself an androgynous alien… I see kids venerating that imagery with the occult community… But that's not where the witch is" (Tanya)

Tanya's comments suggest that there are some fractions within Paganism. Some individuals feel there is a certain way to be a witch. However the data for this thesis is more in line with the theory that there is no one way to be-witch and the idea of

Witch is likely to continue to change due to the rhizome-mycellial nature of Witch identities. Yet it is also useful to understand that similar to identity, the other is also fluid, ever changing and constructed, thus there will always be times when witches are othererd or other themselves.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has explored themes relating to study, heritage, authority and othering and identified that there are opportunities within social networking spaces for witches to create rhizomatic and mycelial networks. Self and group study are an essential element to becoming Witch. It is an expectation that every self-identified witch will engage in self-study and use books, Internet websites, chatrooms, blogs and social networking spaces to become Witch. They reflect on their learning and often change their mind and practice because of new experiences and further knowledge. They create an individualised epistemology of Witchcraft and personal understandings about the ontology of Witch (Hope and Jones, 2006). Furthermore, self-study was part of the natural journey of becoming Witch for the Life History Narrative witches and some of this happened in groups.

Group work also enabled the witch to self-reflect and develop praxis thus co-created knowledge through human experiences (Bauman, 2007: 81) which in turn enabled Witch becomings (Coco, 2002). Often such groups were housed within social media platforms such as chat rooms and Instant Messaging, but at times, social networking spaces offered advertisements about training, offline moots and pagan events that provided opportunities to learn with larger offline communities. Such training events were organised through nationally recognised groups such as The Pagan Federation

but also by individuals who saw themselves as an authority and offered training. What is interesting about any form of study was that witches tended to be eclectic with knowledge creation and blended many experiences and paths to create a personalised Craft. They therefore used spiritualities from other religions and cultures. The morphing was considered usual for Witch becomings because it added to the existing branch of Paganism but enabled it to continually evolve.

Other themes addressed in this chapter concern authority and Witch heritage. Often a cyber-witch would be online and offer advice or promote certain aspects of Witch. This would imply they had an authority to administer their understanding and knowledge of Witchcraft to others. However, often the claim to authority was unsubstantiated and thus witches tried to legitimise their authority by linking to a perceived heritage. To establish authority, they would claim one or more of the following links to Witch heritage.

1. They were a descendent of the historically infamous Salem or Pendle witches
2. They claimed their craft was directly related to the founder of Wicca
3. They suggested that Paganism predated Christianity

The need to claim a heritage may be due to the historical persecution that witches have encountered and which some witches still experience today, and the Satan-witch stereotype threat (Hutton, 2017). However, Witch identities are fluid and as has been noted in previous chapters, there is an open attitude to what a witch is and how to be a witch. This could be because there is no set dogma in Paganism hence there is an acceptance that there are multiple Witch ontologies. Authority therefore is not an essentialist component to becoming Witch. If a witch says something to be

true and another disagrees, then the truth-claim is personal and that is an accepted position of The Craft.

What is more, becoming Witch is also at times connected to becoming celebrity. Cyber-witches are given an authority of the Craft through the online community and this is shown by the numbers of followers on Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. The individual may offer wisdoms that are no different to another witch but their claim is valued by many people possibly because of the mediatisation of their truth and the ability to offer a sense of authenticity to the online community (Garcia-Rapp, 2017). This means therefore that there is a growth of a new form of Witch that is a direct result of the neo-liberal platfroms of social media. Celebrity-witch has happened in the past with Starhawk and Budapest, but not in the same manner as Wiccan witch Harmny Nice or The Sassy She witch Lisa Lister, or The Oracle of Los Angeles Amanda Yates-Garcia[70] for example, who have managed to directly tap into the wider public and become celebrity, initially through the use of social media such as Instagram and YouTube.

In addition to claiming Witch heritage and Witch authority, Witch identities are explained through comparisons to, and with Christianity. Witches use examples from Christianity as a way to explain what they are not and also to define what they are (Pullen and Simpson, 2009). Actively deciding to unbecome a previous faith tradition enabled witches to start to form the witch they wished to become (Greenhough, 2018; Roger and O'Connor, 2017). At times the process of

[70] https://oracleoflosangeles.com (accessed 25.01.20) Amanda Yates-Garcia is a professional witch who claims to have supported many celebrities. She offers ritual, classes and personal training. Her book Initiated was published in 2019

unbecoming encouraged the witches to make comparisons between the new faith and old, but such comparisons were at times anti-Christian. Anti-Christian sentiments were possibly as a result of the perceived ongoing persecution of witches since the Witchcraft trials. Yet asking for the reasons behind any anti-Christian sentiment was not a question that was asked to the Life History Narrative witches, or to the Online community, because the purpose of this study was to collect data of becomings rather than reasons for becomings. Exploring this line of enquiry may be an opportunity for future study.

Finally, on occasion a witch would consciously set themselves apart from society and become different as form of protest and as an act of symbolic violence to the stereotype of Witch. They wanted to become the othered-witch in order to create conversations that may dispel misconceptions (similar to Badr, 2004) or as David noted, they wanted to rebel against societal norms. Yet at times becoming an othered-witch happened from the inside of the pagan community due to non-normative pagan performances within the faith. A witch may consciously or subconsciously decide not to follow a common way of practicing The Craft. For some witches, such as Tanya who had followed a Gardnerian Witchcraft, this new practice was a fad and therefore they did not think it validated the witch identity. In such cases witches would be othered from inside the community. The next chapter of this thesis will expand on these ideas and explores the performances of Witch in popular culture, general cultures and media.

Chapter Six: Performing Witch

"Sacred sound has always been part of my work and when I work with the fae" (Tanya)

"Most people go out and have a cheesy cigarette and I'm out there with a tea light!" (Holly)

"It's odd but there's some nice stuff involved" (Felicity)

"We all like a ceremony...but I ain't dancing naked around a good fire" (Penny)

So far, this thesis discusses how Witch is described by society and how individuals use the stereotypes and identities to confirm and create their own authentic self. Furthermore, it analyses the ways witches claim Witch identities through a perceived heritage, links to Christianity, the idea of authority and self or group study. This chapter adds to the discussion and analyses how individuals perform Witch. It considers how the use of objects, behaviours and utterances within ritual create performances and it is the performance that helps individuals become Witch. Witch is not an essentialist identity and social networking spaces are "not neutral vehicles of information exchange but involve a particular construction of the message in terms of meaning and aesthetics" (Hjarvard and Lundy, 2018: 57). Through playing with visual and written discourses related to Witch identities therefore, individuals create a heuristic of Witch and in turn confirm collective understandings of what Witch may be.

This third data chapter analyses how the Life History Narrative participants present and perform their witch identities through their choice of objects, rituals and

behaviours. The witches suggest that it is usual to use objects such as candles and incense to work spells, which is also a finding that is reflected online. Social networking spaces such as Instagram, Pinterest and Facebook present posts and images of occult objects for example tarot cards and ouija boards along with rituals, altars and on occasion advice about spell casting. Such posts collectively create visual discourses of what it means to be Witch and the speech acts establish the performance of Witchcraft and Witch becomings.

6.1 Performing Identities

To fully analyse the utterances of the witches in this study, and explore the dataset in detail, it is important to consider the connotations that are attached to the idea of performance because 'performance' can imply make-believe and pretence. The term is commonly associated with art and culture (Schechner, 2005). Often ideas, stories and emotions are performed through the medium of dance, drama, music and art and such medium presents a reality, which at times requires the observer to suspend their own reality and accept a performance as an accepted truth, for example, violence and death within films, and some modern art installations. Hence performance that is acted or presented artistically represent actor's, director's and artist's conceptualised truth rather than an actualised truth. Theatre, art, film and dance productions perform fictitious stories that are intended to have some form of emotional reaction from the audience and at times challenge the notion of reality and truth.

Thus, performance in theatre, film, art and dance are representations of ideas and realisms rather than actual realities or an element of religion (LaMothe, 2005). Butler acknowledges identity performances and notes that accepting a theatrical staged

performance of a transvestite for example, is more palatable for some than a transvestite who is not on the stage. This is because the theatrical performance of gender identity may challenge social norms, yet the audience do not feel it is a threat to their existing belief systems because the performance is considered role-play (Butler, 1988: 527). Whilst on stage, a non-normative performance is considered make-believe and thus an accepted truth by the audience, albeit a truth that is suspended and limited to the time-length of the performance.

To use this artistic understanding of performance with the data within this thesis therefore, suggests that the performance of an online witch identity could be a presentation of a perceived version of Witch rather than the reality of Witch. The witch identities presented in social networking spaces challenge stereotypical notions of Witch. They are also non-threatening to non-witch audiences and societal norms because they are performing what a witch should or could be, rather than indicating the reality of what a witch is. This is exemplified in image 12 that depicts Wiccan witch Harmony Nice performing ritual amongst an elevated book of shadows. Additionally, image 27 by the Silver Witch contains an enemy-binding spell that is over-layered on a photograph of a hand holding fire that is suspended above the palm. Both are examples of Witchcraft but are a suspension of reality within the ritualised performances of Witch.

Understanding performance in this way may become problematic however, for it implies people are being disingenuous. Witches are playing with make-believe representations of Witch rather than presenting their authentic self. Yet as has been explored in chapter three, playing with Witch identities through performance can

offer opportunities to try on various identities within a safe playful space before fully actualising their witch identity (Zuckerman, 2010; Iberman, 2010). Witch identities are likely therefore, to be continuous constructed performances rather than final representations of the authentic self because the individual is constantly becoming; as is demonstrated with Mike's becoming that was discussed in chapter four of this thesis and Pagan Poppet's post that notes a witch identity is never static (image 21). Furthermore, to become something an individual need to unbecome something else (Greenough, 2018; Grosz, 2005). As Rogers and O'Connor argue, "on the way to a new identity one has to discard what one has been seen as in order to secure the new identity as one's own" (2017: 156). The Life History Narratives of Sienna, Jenny and Tanya noted that they unbecame Christian to become a witch.

Another point to consider with performance is the connection between the Arts and spirituality. Emotions, belief systems and ideologies are represented within dance, drama, music, and art, hence performance through the arts is an accepted form of human expression. On occasion a performance can become an ontology of spirituality and religion rather than a representation of spirituality and religion (Pike, 2001; LaMothe, 2005). Examples would be Islamic Sufi Dancers and Tibbetian Buddhist dancers, whose dance is a performance that uplifts the spirit and enables the Buddhist and Sufi Muslim to become closer to the divine (Ricard, 2003). Similarly, Liturgical dance and drama in Christianity, is performed as worship (Goens, 1999; Pardue, 2005), and the creation of icons in Hinduism are examples of hierophany[71] that inhabit and manifest divinity (Eliade, 1987).

[71] As has been explained earlier in this thesis, Eliade explains hierophany to be the manifestation of God in everything. 'Religious man' is likely to experience Hierophany on a daily basis

None of these examples suggest that the individuals are creating a perceived version of what it means to be faithful. Rather, the artistic performances have become the mode to actualising faith and as Ezzy suggests, "Dancing to pagan music is a central part of contemporary pagan religious practice. It is a key practice that contributes to personal transformation…it changes their embodied performed sense of self" (Ezzy 2014: 110). Hence the Arts are the enablers of faith identities and performance is the self-actualiser of Witch. As part of ritual many witches dance and create music to raise energy, which is the vehicle for spell casting. They do this through chanting and movement in sacred circles as is exemplified in the Facebook video of a wassail song and tree ceremony dance that is presented in screenshot image 22.

Furthermore, performance is attributed to religious ritual such as Holy Communion in Roman Catholicism, the Amrit ceremony in Sikhism or Puja in Hinduism and is presented through the performance of words, space, objects, behaviours, clothing and food (Schechner, 2005: Xi). Performance can be viewed as a web of interrelated dynamic connections and so is attributed to theatre, art and music but also it is "the ritualization of animals (including humans) through performances in everyday life" (Schechner, 2005: xi). Some of the witches in the Life History Narrative interviews said that they performed daily ritual that involved meditation, dance, music, art and chanting. For example

"I do a Hindu chant and do it for 40 days to see if it works" (Tanya)
"Meditation helped keep it on a daily even keel" (Mike)

“I have sort of thought that it might be a good idea to try to put some kind of spell on a stone so that she can keep it in her pocket and not have him be as big as an influence as he is being” (Ellie)

Moreover, Witchcraft is performed through online posts that identify ritualised experiences and this relates to Austin’s speech act theory (1998). Austin acknowledged that words affected ritualistic performance and categorised three forms of speech acts: Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary speech acts. Speech Act theory is useful for this chapter because the meaning behind what is written enables the speech act to become actualised. The connection between what is said, and what is meant, means that the performance within the ritual becomes important. The speech act is the performance of the Craft and so “it is the context and intentions of the speech that fixes the meaning of speech acts and renders them authoritative and therefore performative” (Jagger, 2008: 65).

The written utterances that describe the action have as much significance and power as if they were spoken. Therefore, because the written word can affect the audience, it is considered an authentic and true practice (McComas, 2015: 535) as Mike noted “words have a lot of power”. Images 26, 27, 28 are online examples of illocutionary and/or perlocutionary speech acts. The spell that is written on the image becomes actualised through the words especially if they are spoken. Which is a similar sentiment to Sally’s Life History Narrative; “It comes naturally because the power of your own words and the power of your intent and it’s what you want…you can feel the words and stuff.”

Finally, performance can also be the way in which individuals create identities and personal realities. It is understood in gender studies that gender is not what is done to someone or what they are, but what they do (or perform) that present a gendered identity. Gender is what is created through a series of repeated actions that are gendered (Salih, 2002: 55). Consequently, gender identity is performed through gender signifiers that have been socially constructed. An example of performative constructs of a gender identity could be stiletto heels, make up, skirt and stockings to signify the feminine gender.

Witch identities can be considered in a similar way to gendered identities. An individual will present a witch identity through including cosmetics, objects, language, behaviour and clothing that they feel represent Witch to them within their online posts. Furthermore, society offers a set 'script' or 'wardrobe' (Salih, 2002) of identities that represent a stereotype of a witch. However, a potential witch chooses from the offered biased scripts and, through the performing of such identities, creates a hegemonic discourse of what a witch is and is not. Many Witch identities that use Witch signifiers i.e. broom, pointed hat, black clothing, cat, are performed online and the repeated use of them creates an unconscious bias of Witch.

Greenough (2018) explores how gender is reinforced through repeated behaviours that are imposed by society. Much of what he argues can be applied to Witch identities and Witch stereotype. I include the term [Witch] as a replacement of the term gender in the quotation below to emphasise this point.

> "[Witch] ~~gender~~ can be viewed as culturally enforced and driven by compulsory [Witch-stereotype] ~~heterosexuality~~. Such ~~gender~~ [Witch] norms

> are powerful only because they have been established and repeated. Thus ~~gendered~~ [Witch] identity is brought and perpetuated through its own repetition." (Adapted quotation from Greenough, 2018: 59)

Therefore, a witch identity is enforced by the online community through the repeated use of witch signifiers. This happens through the continual sharing of similar images that include signifiers such as the pointed hat, book of shadows, candles, wearing black, a cat. Hence, the repeated use and sharing of such images establish what witches are and what they are not. Moreover, Witch is self-created through performing with the signifiers. Thus, the performance of Witch is monitored by witches themselves and Witch-norms are created by those who consider themselves to have non-normative faith identities. This is ironic however, because such individuals potentially create a hegemonic essentialist performance of what a witch is without realising it.

The next six sections within this chapter explore the notion of performance of Witch through the performance frameworks identified above. The data is analysed through the themes of performative signifiers of the witch, personalised solitary performance, group performance, performing ritual, and alterity of Witch.

6.2 Popular Culture and Witch Performances

This section discusses the influence of Witch signifiers that are evident in popular culture. The Life History Narrative witches acknowledged that their witch identities were affected by popular culture such as film, music and magazines. They noted that they have always felt an affinity to the occult, to witches within the media and

towards Witchcraft and new age spiritualities. The popular culture that they mentioned were the television series *Bewitched*, books such as *Discovery of Witches* and films for example *The Craft* and *Fern Gulley.* Such media confirmed to them the type of witch they felt they were becoming as was exemplified by Mike in his Life History Narrative; "Films like that and children's TV programme… obviously played a part…films that display magic and chant" (Mike). Such examples within mediatised media encouraged the witches to self-reflect and realise that Witch was a potential faith position. Moreover, that being a witch can be an empowering experience, which Ezzy notes as "self-ethic" (2003: 50). For others, for example Kellie, the influence of popular culture helped them confirm the praxis of Witchcraft and become the witch they wanted to be; "I've always been a kind of supernatural, been kind of drawn even when I was younger by watching *Charmed* and stuff like that" (Kellie).

Similarly, many social networking posts included images that were from cult films or TV programmes. They contained quotations that developed into religious memes because of the sharing (Campbell, 2018). The meme suggested that like the Life History Narratives, popular culture affected a sense of witch-self. For example, image 1 in Chapter six is from the TV series *Bewitched* and shows the main character (Samantha) crafting a spell with a meme noting that she is a witch. Image 2 and image 4 are from the cult film *The Craft* and include quotes from the film. Image 3 is from the film *Practical Magic* and includes an image from a scene that celebrates the crone and sisterhood. Image 5a and image 5b depict the main character from the Netflix series *The New Adventures of Sabrina* and advertises merchandise. Furthermore, image 6 shows the links connected to the hashtag Sabrinawitch. Such

posts suggest that people are finding some connection with these examples of Witch (Pearson, 2003) and specifically the popularist image of witches (Ezzy 2003: 117).

The Life History responses and the online social media posts suggest that popular culture resonated in some way with the individual who posted the image. However how it resonated with the person who responded with a like, share or comment was not always explicitly noted in the comments. Nevertheless, inference can be taken from the image and hashtags (Emmison, 2016; Heath, 2016) because the symbols, hashtag or words within the image and the adaptation of the image or quotation, formulates and illustrates a sense of a personalised meaning and group identity (Weisbuch-Remington, Mended, Seery and Blasovich, 2005). Therefore, memes about witches in film and the use of witch images has affected (in some way) a sense of what a witch is for some individuals who are becoming Witch.

Group identity formation and meaning was observed in Gal, Shifman and Kampf's (2016) research about memetic responses from the LGBTQ community. Collective identity of LGBTQ was created and reinforced through the meme "it Gets Better". They argued that "The memetic practice is not merely an expression of existing social cultural norms; it is also a social tool for negotiating them" (Gal et al, 2016: 3). This idea can be applied to the Witch memes and film quotations that are used in the social media images listed above. Witch identities are presented within popular culture and the messages and memes represent the collective norm of some of the archetypes of what it means to be a witch. For example, white versus black, good versus evil, non-conformist versus wanting to conform. Each meme is a performance of Witch and "reflects a specific attitude of the meme creator" (Gal et al, 2016: 3).

Therefore, if someone saves or reuses the image then it can be assumed that the individual agrees with the creator. Moreover, the reusing enables the creation of a collective identity of what a witch is and how a witch behaves.

In the Life History Narrative interview, Holly noted that popular culture ignited her interest in Witchcraft. She decided to find out more about aspects of the Craft through exploring the Internet and books; "I think I saw Paganism first on the TV or something like meditation and me going what the heck is that and I googled it" (Holly). Rather than help form how she wanted to behave, Holly saw the performances of Witch in popular television programmes and films as make-believe. But she used these influences and came to understand that Witch was a construct. She blended her reflections with observations of how 'real' witches performed ritual during attendance at offline festivals and by taking part in group-led performances. Nevertheless, Holly did use websites, social media and some online v-logs to help glean information and discover general Witch epistemologies. For example, she used Pinterest, YouTube and Instagram to discover how to conduct spells and create a sacred space through calling the corners.

"At first, I was very much like, follow the steps exactly as they are in the book you know... so I sort of gathered materials for various things…made my first altar and started doing very basic kind of rituals and finding out about the wheel of the year and all that stuff" (Holly)

Penny said that the popular culture she engaged with tended to present the darker side of the occult rather than popularist Witchcraft (Ezzy, 2003a). Even though Penny experimented with the "darker side of Witchcraft" (Penny) when she was a teenager, this interest did not seem to influence her Witch becomings so that she

followed a non-goddess form of Witchcraft such as the Lucifarian or a Satanist path [1]of Paganism.

"When I was growing up it was big films – it was the Exorcist, Wicker Man, Season of the Witch, which is an interesting film…I could be a very nasty old woman if I wanted to be…but I chose not to, not to let it consume me" (Penny)

Popular culture influences identity formation and has the capacity to enable minority groups feel less isolated in society because they have examples of similar minded people.

David acknowledged that Witch was not present within popular culture when he was in the early stages of his becomings and that made him feel isolated and othered. Hoover (1997) suggests that popular culture offers ways to interpret the paranormal whereas Clark (2003) notes that film can provide alternative views of reality thus enabling young people to consider the possibility of non-normative faith positions and the occult. Jenny noted that watching the cult film *The Craft* enabled her to see that "Witchcraft was a real thing and Paganism was a real thing". She also explained however that it was not solely popular culture that affected her becoming and noted that she was influenced by the "other people I was hanging out with as well and the things they were talking about" (Jenny). Sharing and discussing popular culture and ideas about the occult and Witchcraft with friends therefore, created a sense of belonging for Jenny: "All my friends were into *The Craft* and I was into music as well" (Jenny).

[1] Lucifarian and/or Satanism Witchcraft relates to worshipping Lucifer or Satan and is another branch of Paganism

Berger and Ezzy's research into teenage witches acknowledged that, "popular culture has also encouraged the acceptance of magical realism through movies…a belief in magic and the performance of ritual seems acceptable" (2007: 229). Hence there are more people publicly identifying as Witch than there were 30 or 40 years ago. The interest in social networking spaces and popular culture seem to be the enablers for the growth of a liquid modern approach to Witchcraft as was reported in Ford's BBC news video (2019) that interviewed three self-proclaimed witches. The positive influence of modern technology and popular culture for the 21st century generation was also noted in the responses from Penny who was in her 60s and David who was the oldest, and longest serving Life History Narrative witch.

"It's all on TV and it's films and everything you like. I had none of that... it's now acceptable and you're not going to get people knock on your door, drag you out in the streets, and burn you!" (David)

"There were no programmes on TV there were no films and I didn't see W*izard of Oz* until much later. There was nothing like *Harry Potter*...and then I came across *Carpenell*. It was about and girl on holiday and they met a witch and she had a flying rocking chair. She didn't like broomsticks and she had a rocking chair that was made of old broomsticks, so she sped along in this. There was just nothing – no mention [of witches]" (David)

The performativity of Witch is clearly evident in 21st century media and within the hashtags of social networking spaces such as Instagram or Twitter.[72] Online postings within social media reinforce Witch stereotypes through the signifiers and memes that link to postmodern Witchcraft and witches. Therefore, witches are presented in a certain way i.e. wearing a pointed hat, using a cauldron and owning a black cat.

[72] *#witch and #gothicwitch* are two hash tags that are on Instagram and Twitter and offer a plethora of examples of Witch identities

Performing a stereotypical witch identity can seem duplicitous because the images are not a true reflection of an authentic self. It can seem that the individual is playing at Witch rather than being a witch i.e. they have a broom as an aesthetic rather than for its ritualistic purpose. The Instagram images 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 identify some of the stereotypes related to the hashtag #witch and #gothicwitch. The Witch identity within the screenshots presents a performance of Witch using a wardrobe of clothing and objects (Salih, 2002). Yet it is not dogma to read tarot, dress in black, own a familiar and have tattoos. The online visual discourses of Witch and Witchcraft therefore are performativities of what a witch is or could be.

For the Life History Narrative witches, being a witch was innate and so Witch identities did not have to be performed externally through such performativities. Indeed, Tanya suggested that "The ones that lean to it (sexy vamp or dark goth) are possibly ones that don't come off the Internet 'cause it's really easy to hide behind a persona on the Internet... you can create yourself a whole personality, a whole persona but it doesn't carry through to real life." (Tanya).

Yet some of the Life History Narrative witches did enjoy playing with and using a witch stereotype such as wearing black, owning a pentagram charm, calling a cat a familiar and using a wand. They felt that a recognised witch's wardrobe (Salih, 2002) supported Witch becomings because it was a display of Witch self. "I was wearing a pentangle, so people were coming to me and saying, 'You're one!' and we became friends" (Jenny).

Therefore, Witch self was explored through the engagement with some aspects of

social media that included Witch stereotypes and Witch signifiers such as the crone, cauldron, broom, pointed hat and goth image. Such performativities of Witch resonated with the Life History witches. Many self-identified with a specific witch identity by adding the post or image to their own social media account or replicating aspects of the performance into their own practise. As was stated by Life History Narrative witch Ellie; "I might take a picture of the [tarot] card…I then like to scroll through Instagram and then look at other people's picture of decks and see a of the ones I might like" (Ellie).

On the one hand using performativities of Witch could be because individuals are exploring rather than becoming Witch (Berger and Ezzy, 2007) and so the use of Witch signifiers is part of experimental identity play. Yet on the other hand it could be because the individual has dual identities (one online and one offline) and have created who they wish to be online. But, as it is difficult to know the intention of the person who posted the original image, (Cowan, 2005) we do not know if this is the reason for the re-tweet, hashtag or the collection on the social media platform. It is unclear therefore whether the person offline is similar to the one online and why the hashtags or images were significant to that individual. Nonetheless, the image may still be considered authentic to the person who posted the image.

Stylized images of Witch using a signifier of Witch demonstrate a playful performance of Witch identity, as is exemplified in images 9 and 10 and image 11 that use a witch's wardrobe of crystals, dark clothing, tattooed body, pentagram, tarot cards Book of Shadows. Such Witch signifiers do not necessarily create a witch identity, rather, they show a performativity of Witch through the gothic objects,

make up, clothes and images. Thus, confirming a stylised Witch identity that is playful and non-normative.

Being playful and different to the norm is a personal characteristic that many witches in this study identified with. The gothic Witch identity for example was re-enforced within social media through the online community reusing the image of a gothic witch, hence reinforcing that Witch is indeed gothic and it is a signifier of Witch. The individual became gothic witch through the "(un)conscious repetition of [Witch] accessories and behaviours" (adapted quotation from Greenough, 2018: 59). Furthermore, within social networking spaces, Witch identities are performed through Occult objects such as tarot cards and ouija boards, images of altars, Grimoires and candles (image 12). Such objects were socially constructed recognised tools of Witchcraft as is suggested in the statement and comments in Instagram image 13 that shows a tarot deck and candles. This may be because of the repetitive use of such objects within online posts. The tools of tarot and candles have become a heuristic of Witch.

The older and more experienced Life History Narrative witches said that Witchcraft was related to intention, rather than objects and performance. Therefore, Witch signifiers such as wearing a gothic style of dress or using occult objects were not necessarily needed unless they had practical value. Thus, the general agreement with the Life History Narrative witches and many online posts was that it was not the objects that created Witch becomings but the intention of the witch when using them.

However, the stylised objects and dress presented within social networking posts suggest to a person new to Witchcraft that they are an important part of being a witch. Hence some objects have become the accepted and recognised tool of Witchcraft and were used by the Life History Narrative witches within this study, such as candles, smudging sticks, an altar, incense and crystals. Also occult divination tools, i.e. runes, divination cards, dowsing rods and pendulums. Part of their Witch becomings was using and learning how to use such objects. Each of the witches unconsciously performed the hegemonic, socially constructed cultural witch-norm when using such Witch signifiers.

"I have OM cards and do little readings on these and put them on Facebook or Instagram to see what else there is more information on" (Lexie)

"I do believe in using smudge sticks and think you do feel better for it… I do have an altar and I use my candles on the altar" (Felicity)

"Incense candles, just something we can look at" (Kelly)

What is interesting about the responses from the witches within the Life History Narrative interviews however, is that none explained in detail how their performativity of Witch was directly influenced by specific popular culture. They expressed that films, books, music or TV programmes sparked an interest in them about what a witch was, but they did not necessarily explore how the signifiers in the popular culture showed them how to become a witch.

They acknowledged that their engagement may have made them feel less isolated, as in the case of David "Kids don't realise how lucky they are, like with the music; there

was no heavy rock, no Black Sabbath. There's no occult mentioned in anything whatsoever. Everything was mediated through the Church of England". Yet few explained how the media directly altered their witch identity and influenced Witch becomings. It is difficult therefore to confidently conclude that the performativity of a witch within a film or specific online platform affected how the Life History Narrative witches presented their idea of a witch. However, it can be surmised that the reinforcement of signifiers through the positive reinforcement of operant conditioning within social networking spaces, affected collective understanding of Witch i.e. the frequent likes and sharing of images reinforced the what a witch was.

It is safe to conclude therefore that the inclusion of Witch signifiers within social networking spaces, such as a set of tarot cards in image 14 and candles, an altar and a black cat in image 15 influence personal Witch becomings. The online presentations that are self-created within the social media platforms illustrate personal witch identities because they indicate what that individual considers is important to them. This is particularly evident in Pinterest and Instagram where it is possible to create a montage of images with personal comments that demonstrate the influences of becoming Witch. Thus, Pinterest and Instagram offer a bricolage of Witch (Beavis, 2016). This also occurs in Facebook movie and Facebook timeline where the technology collates the images and posts to produce a story of a person's life. Image 16 is a good example of the online montage because it includes a wide selection of influences to the construction of The Celtic Cottage Witch's identity.

Conversely, having an online Witch presence seemed not to be a fundamental element to the becomings of most of the Life History Narrative witches. Nine of the 13 witches did not have a strong online Witch presence and did not often post

personal images. Tanya and David shared epistemologies of Witchcraft through Instagram and Facebook by liking pages and tagging people in or posting a comment. Mark created his own blog about woodland walks and plants, and Felicity had “a fairy garden webpage”. Tanya had tried to upload images of rituals she had engaged in but often found that images would not reproduce online, or the technology would fail whilst uploading. She suggested there was a supernatural rather than a technical reason for the failure.

Ellie was the only witch who frequently posted personal ideas about The Craft and shared images of tarot cards via Instagram, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. She would post a tarot spread and provide readings. She felt that the posts developed her confidence in the performance of Witch because she would “show them the cards, explain what they meant”. Ellie acknowledged that the reason she engaged with social media so often was because “I am definitely of that generation where we, you know, where we are always on our phones” (Ellie). Interestingly, the other 12 witches in this study also embraced technology and four where of the same age range as Ellie but they still chose not to post their personal practice on social media. Their choice for not posting was related to the secret nature of Wiccan philosophy, personal confidence or ethics; “I’ve gone on a few forums and follow on Twitter and stuff. I don’t generally say my own thing” (Grace).

6.3 Engaging Online

Some of the Life History Narrative witches explained that they responded to posts on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, whilst others surfed websites and posts for specific information, but did not post any comments and preferred to lurk. Online lurking is

common for many individuals especially when someone is a newcomer to a topic or the type of technology that is being used (Preece, Nonnecke and Andrews, 2004). The term 'lurker' has negative connotations but it may not necessarily be a negative behaviour type (Edelmann, 2013). Lurking behaviours such as reading comments but not posting a response can be considered parasitic but may in fact be due to personality types or lack of confidence to share personal opinions with those within the community (Edelmann, 2013). Additionally, it may be because there is a fear of reprisals or not wanting to seem uneducated in The Craft (Fan, Wu and Chiang, 2009). Moreover, the reason for online lurking rather than writing or responding to a post can be because trust has not been built with the online community due to the anonymous nature of online identities hence there is a lack of intimacy (Sun, Rau and Ma, 2014; Cowan, 2005).

Lurking online is not viewed as a negative behaviour type in this thesis because those that did lurk were not as passive as it seemed. They became active observers of online content and ardently sought out information. A witch who lurked online took part in active reading and listening. Hence for this study, the witches who quietly engaged online still had the potential to influence rhizomatic and mycelium connections by sharing gleaned information with "other online groups or offline settings, [which may] lead to connections with other networks, as well as bring new contacts and members." (Edelman, 2013: 647). Online lurking was a behaviour that was demonstrated by Sienna and Penny.

"I never met people on the Internet, I would look at people's blogs and websites and things, but I never actually interacted with people on the Internet about religion…I'm a little nervous of who is online" (Sienna)

Penny expressed that she rarely presented herself as a witch unless she knew she was talking to someone who would be sympathetic to her spirituality and identity "I post blessings and things. Depends on who I'm talking to. I'll end with Blessed Be!" (Penny).

Through engaging with online content, a user can build up social capital so that they begin to feel part of the online community, which may lead to them contributing to discussions on a wider selection of forums. Interdonato, Pulice and Tagarelli note that "by acquiring knowledge from the observation of user-generated communications, lurkers build their own ideas, opinions, interests, though never or rarely will they let other people know their value" (2016: 263). The Life History Narrative witches used the information gleaned in their personal online lurking to develop their Witch becomings. David said that he gained information by trawling the Internet and "going on for hours at a time" and Mike noted that,

"I recently read about poppets. So 'you may do this and this and this'. So, you just use your imagination to just build links so it's again the power of the story and power links and that abstraction in so many ways"

Both active lurking and/or responding to online posts helped create a personalised apprenticeship of Witchcraft within an online community of practice. An apprentice witch such as Ellie and Kelly who were the least experienced witches of the Life History Narrative interviews, learned The Craft and reflected on it through a digital medium. Ellie posted personal comments and micro-blogged. Kelly however chose to lurk and learn the Craft in a more cognitive manner. She did this through engaging with posts from other witches and gathering information but did not share her personal journey or practice (Lave and Wenger, 1999; Sun et al, 2014).

The apprenticeship model of lurking is not a crucial ingredient to Witch becomings, what is crucial however is the process of reflecting. Witch performance demonstrates a non-essentialist structure to identity formation and it is the individual's reflection on the relationship between the practice, theory and signifiers that enable the creation of personalised witch identities. Reflections can be explicit and presented in a comment but often reflections are more implicit and non-obvious, thus demonstrated through the saving and sharing of posts; becoming a montage of self.

The performativities of Witch had some effect on Witch identities because the online posts develop into an accepted understanding of Witch due to repeated patterns and use. It was widely agreed amongst the online community that to become a witch, an individual needed to find a witch identity that resonated with them and then perform said identity in a way that suits their personality type. Greenough (2020: 27) discusses how essentialism suggests identity is fixed but argues that identity is made up by a selection of identities i.e. race, ethnicity, class that relate to each other. This argument is similar to my understanding of Witch identities.

The various online performances of Witch are pieced together to create a personalized witch within a social platform such as Pinterest or Instagram, as is presented in image 16 that displays a montage of various posts to create a personalised understanding of Witchcraft and Witch. Also, image 20 is an example of Itty Bitty Celtic Witch's YouTube channel. Each v-log housed in this social media platform explains an aspect of Witchcraft. When all videos are viewed together, they offer an example of a polyphonic bricolage (Schmidt, 2003: 10) and exemplify Itty

Bitty Celtic Witch's identity. Hence posts rarely present an end point to Witch becomings, but more a piecemeal of the compartments that lead to identity formation and are "socially and culturally formed" (Greenough, 2020: 19).

6.3.1 Blogging and use of Hashtags

All Life History Narrative witches were interested in the micro-blogging presented within Instagram, Pinterest, and Twitter but not all posted personal comments, preferring active lurking. They did however become inspired by online posts and reflected on the content to adapt their practice, so their personal craft mirrored something akin to what they had read or observed. The adaptation either confirmed what they already felt about their witch identity or helped develop it in some way. For example, Ellie noted that she would find posts that were of interest to her about tarot decks and card readings on Instagram or Pinterest and then adapt her reading of tarot accordingly, whereas Holly would reflexively use the online posts to validate her craft. She said, "often I see on pagan Facebook groups and all sorts of things. People have these huge amazing altar with all sorts of stuff on them but, it's very different to how I would do it" (Holly).

Blogging, micro-blogging and video blogging makes the "the ordinary visible to others" (Oulasvirta, Lehtonen, Kurvinen and Raento, 2010: 238) meaning that the blog resonates to the online readers because it has explicitly identified a similar implicit feeling or thought pattern. Furthermore, micro-blogs that includes "a hashtag, presupposes that a post has an ambient audience who may share or contest the values construed by the accompanying verbiage" (Zappavigna, 2013: 211). Therefore, witches who followed a blog or shared a micro-blog or hashtag did so

because they already had an interest in the subject matter and were actively searching out a type of post to confirm what they already felt about Witch. Consequently, they further created their faith identity through performativities of Witch that were demonstrated or discussed in the blog and which they replicated in some way.

What is of further interest is how some individuals have chosen to share their personal becomings through micro-blogging on the same platform as a celebrity witch. The example in the box below shows comments from three YouTubers who briefly shared their personal stories underneath Wiccan Witch Harmony Nice's YouTube v-Log about Runes. They note that Harmony's authenticity and knowledge has influenced their personal journey and confidence to now share their stories online: demonstrating that her blog has enabled readers to self-reflect.

Foreign Tongues: Thank you for being educational and open about your beliefs… this video was just making me think about things and I wanted to share my thoughts. I really love your videos and the whole aesthetic.

Sophie Smith: After seeing you in my recommendation box and watching your Wiccan video, I feel so happy.

cassy pepe: So I bought these secretly and brought them home … once I used them I was blown away.

Nice (2017) Image 17

As it can be assumed that there are many online lurkers who do not post, it is likely that Harmony Nice's v-logs will have influenced many more individuals than that which are presented in the comments section. The impact of her v-logs on Witch becomings is evidence of Rhizome-Mycelium behaviours.

Often comments underneath the micro-blog or blog include information, advice and questions about praxis but at times there is a comment below the original post that suggests that the witch who initiated the discussion has affected change in others. Kiittenmiilk' comment in the box below is a response to an image on the Instagram account of Harmony Nice and expressed how the videos and images have affected her.

> I literally re-watched your 18 things I learnt in 2018 video and it gave me such an epiphany moment, thank you for always – being straightforward with us and being so real, watching your videos has literally changed my life ♡

Nice (2019) Comment in Instagram post

Other bloggers such as the Itty Bitty Celtic Witch (image 20) have similar comments under her video posts, but her impact on other witches does not seem to be as significant because the comments are responses to the theme of the video rather than responses to her and how she personally has influenced the user.

Gaining the title of an influencer or celebrity happens when the number of followers reaches a critical mass (Boermann, 2020). This can happen because the online algorithms enable a person's profile to go viral (Campbell, 2018) and because the influencer is considered by the online population to be credible, attractive and authentic (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; De Veirman and Hudders, 2017). A Celebrity-witch therefore potentially has more opportunity to influence Witch becomings.

Celebrity witches Lisa Lister, Amanda Yates Garcia and Harmony Nice have over 35,000 followers,[73] and they would be known in media and marketing studies as a Macro Influencer and "Instafamous" because they have become popular on Instagram and now have a celebrity status (Boerman, 2020: 199). Whereas Itty Bitty Celtic Witch, who has a few thousand followers would be a Meso Influencer (ibid) because her number of followers is less than 10,000. Lister, Yates Garcia and Nice are considered by the online community to present an authentic witch identity hence have many followers. Also, they are digitally confident and know how to use the mechanisms within the technology to present a stylised and sophisticated Witch aesthetic, that is appealing to the online community. This sentiment was noted in the comment above by the YouTube follower Foreign Tongues.

Therefore, "Instafamous" (Boermann, 2020: 199) Macro influencers reinforce Witch becomings through their use of hashtags. Including a hashtag for example #badwitch #occult #imbolc #familiar infer a relatable experience in order to establish a sense of solidarity and feeling within an online community. Therefore, Witch identities are formed and confirmed within the online community through the blogs and the repeated use of Witch signifiers within the hashtags. Furthermore, it is the performative nature of the engagement that confirms what a witch might be i.e. the use of speech acts such as 'Blessed be' or 'S'mote it be'.[74]

[73] On 10th March 2020, Lisa Lister had 38,100 Instagram followers; Amanda Yates Garcia had 35,300 Instagram followers and Harmony Nice 405,000 Instagram followers. Itty Bitty Celtic Witch has 2,316 Instagram followers. The number of followers is likely to have increased by the publication of this thesis.
[74] Both terms are used in spell casting. See glossary for definitions

Yet initially, witches may not necessarily have intended to brand or celebrity themselves but have become a branded-celebrity due to the networked nature of social media and the platform's purpose. Zappavigna (2014) argues that blogging is social and although the comments are personal, they are not always about creating ideas or presenting a brand but are more interpersonal and intended to create a community of feeling. This community of feeling and authenticity creates the becoming-celebrity through the performativity of Witch.

6.4 Personalised Solitary Performances of Witch

As has been explored in chapter five, a witch will develop their confidence with The Craft through self-study. They create a tailored form of Witchcraft that involves bespoke ritual, personalised learning and reflexivity. Practice of The Craft can be performed with others or alone, forming a belief system that is eclectic and influenced by more than a collective dogma. Jenny was part of a coven but also engaged with solitary practice, and Mike said he used his group work to support his solitary work. "In 2009 I took my 1st degree in Alexandrian Wicca, however the initiation process highlights what you need to work on and for me that was more self-study" (Mike), suggesting therefore that solitary practice is part of a witch's identity. It is interesting to note that some of the Life History Narrative witches did share their personal belief systems and performance of Witchcraft with others through private web forums but did not insist that their practice was the only method for practicing The Craft. For example, Penny noted, "I say you have things at your disposal. Smudging things like that, planting sage. I suppose I do a little bit not a great deal. For me it's a case of working it out yourself. It's not a case of this will work for you" (Penny).

Sharing practice of solitary Witchcraft was evident online. Instagram images 18 and 19 depict a Grimoire. The posts indicate that having a Grimoire is important to The Craft, but the books are not expected to be identical because they should be created from personal praxis. Additionally, image 20 demonstrates a personal approach to Witchcraft from the Itty Bitty Celtic Witch and the users are encouraged not to follow verbatim but to collect and adapt ideas that are offered. Online posts demonstrate a wide selection of examples of the practice of Witchcraft. The posts are intended to be inspirational examples of how a witch can create a bespoke form of Witchcraft and a personalised Witch identity.

Bunt (2018: 3) acknowledges that the Internet enables alternate ways to religion and "subverts traditional models of religious authority". He discusses that a generation of digital natives and the growth of Internet literacies has offered the opportunity to create online environments that have an impact on established, traditional religions. Furthermore, online influences such as alternative methods for ritual can affect practice and can cause "paradigmatic and seismic shifts at a grassroots level" (2018: 8). The potential influence social media can have on individuals has been reflected in each of the data chapters in this thesis. What is more, such influences and alternative approaches to pagan practice seem to be part of the natural evolution of the faith. There seems to be an appreciation within the pagan community of how the Internet is the enabler for a liquid modern witch.

The opportunity to create a personalised form of Witchcraft was one of the appeals for many of the offline and online witches. The mediatisation of Witch seemed to be an accepted development of the faith tradition as was noted by Tanya.

"I suspect what will happen. We will have a split again in pagan reality where we have real life pagans and we will end up with a whole new subculture of the Occult – we are possibly already going that way – where they are almost entirely online… I don't necessarily think it's a bad thing – it will grow and either succeed or fail" (Tanya)

6.4.1. Meditation as Performance

The Life History Narrative witches acknowledged that much of their ritualised practice was performed through silent reflection of what they had learned online and offline. Sienna, Tanya, Grace, Mike, Felicity and Ellie identified that performing meditation and visualisation techniques was key to practicing Witchcraft and being a witch.

"Meditation, you know, re-aligning my chakras and zen out." (Ellie)

"I'll sit an imagine a circle around and I'll first think of that and think of everything. The earth under my feet: It sounds cooky! It's nice to sit and feel and we use it to sit outside and feel part of the earth" (Grace)

"It comes naturally because it's the power of your own words and the power of your intent and it's what you want...you can feel the words and stuff" (Sally)

From the use of the phrases "zen out", "Hindu chant", "Chakras", "mindfulness", "feel part of the earth" it can be concluded that the Life History Narrative witches have used established meditative practices from Zen-Buddhism, Hinduism and

Shintoism within their individualised craft, and created personal meditation techniques. Fernbeck (2002: 256) names such individuals as “zippies”. The witches also acknowledged that their spell work included aspects of cosmic ordering, which has become a popular form of new age spiritual practice.

“You have to be very specific when you do a cosmic order so this time, I’ve got a wish sign and I’ve written it and got it under the sign…It’s between a cosmic order and a spell that I do.” (Sally)

“I started noticing things like Karma... such as cosmic ordering like Id request things and so I got more and more into it then. I got into the energy and the feelings in your hands and that sort of led me down that way” (Penny)

When blending practices from other spiritual pathways, witches are creating a personalised rhizome. In the case of the Life History Narrative witches, they are using meditation in their craft and creating a hybridised personalised form of Witchcraft. Again, exemplifying Speech Act Theory. Religion “is as much about performances, bodies, relationships and emotions as it is about beliefs” (Ezzy, 2014: 28) therefore morphing experiences with personal belief develops a witch’s praxis and the performance of the hybridised meditation supports their witch becomings.

Images of meditation are often attributed to Witchcraft and seem to be a common social media post. This may be because meditation and visualisation techniques are vehicles for casting spells, hence are performed on a regular basis. The intention of a witch is that the visualisations within the meditative practice, carries the spell. The practice is deeply personal and bespoke to the witch. This is apparent in the Twitter posts from @hollycassell below. She suggests that Witchcraft is subjective and so cannot be replicated for other people.

90% of what I do as a witch is reading, writing, studying, analysing esoteric systems like Tarot/astrology/deities, meditating, talking to myself and my plants, sitting with uncomfortable feelings, and manipulating my breath. About 10% is doing spells.

@hollycassell (2019) Image 23

@hollycassell's comment (and those that are similar) may influence becomings because they confirm what Witch is and enable the creation of the type of witch identity a person may wish to have. Witch identities are not static but performed through discourses of ritual, Witch signifiers and speech acts.

It seems therefore that social networking posts influence offline practice because it is expected that the repeated behaviours demonstrated within will be adapted by users and change with every sharing and re-sharing of the original post. It is expected that a witch will take the idea or ritual and make it personal to them. The posts that repeat images of meditation, reading, study, the occult for example reinforce what a witch could be hence establishes what a witch is (Butler, 1988; Greenough, 2018). The comments from the Life History Narrative witches suggest that media influenced their personalised Witchcraft. Solitary performance therefore included objects and witch signifiers such as sage and altars to focus the intention and facilitate spell work.

"I do have an altar and I use my candles on the altar. If there's some I will burn certain herbs for certain occasions… I do believe in using smudge sticks and think you do feel better for it. I can sense energy lifting…I began dowsing 20 years ago and deeply following the wheel of the year" (Felicity)

Felicity's life history narrative identified that she used objects to develop her Witch identity. The implication in her tone when conducting the interview suggested that having Witch signifiers such as an altar, following the wheel of the year and using sage, dowsing rods and/or candles was the expected practice of a witch. Hence, she had a strong understanding of what a witch was and how a witch conducted Witchcraft.

To summarise this section, witches create a bespoke form of Witchcraft through the use of objects and ritual. Whilst online, they share images of their altars, objects and practice, which demonstrate that each is part of the performance of Witch. Objects such as an altar, tarot cards, smudging sticks, candles and wand become signifiers so that if placed within an image or online post the user automatically understands it is part of the witch's toolkit and what it means to be a witch. The more they are shared the more the signifiers become a hegemonic Witch identity. Although most of what is shared and performed is solitary and personal there are times when witches create group performances of Witch. The next section discusses this in more detail.

6.5 Group Performance

The Life History Narrative witches said that they enjoyed the sense of belonging to a community and many moved their interactions onto the Internet because there was limited opportunity to find a local Pagan group. Penny said, that although she did not want to participate with a local coven she knew she could still have a sense of belonging to the Pagan society if she explored online communities. Penny appreciated how she was part of an online community but had the flexibility to believe without belonging to a specific Pagan path, dogma or practice, which suited

her personality and Witch identity. Although Bruce (2002) would argue the Internet and online Pagan communities enable novices to become perceived experts without depth of understanding, Pearson (2003: 173) argues that, "greater levels of diffusion may, in fact, strengthen Paganism". Hence online communities support self-directed faith identities and becomings, which has often been the reason individuals have explored alternative spiritual pathways (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005).

What is more, a witch will develop a personal Witch becoming through blending offline and online performativity. Meaning, they create a "Multiphrenic Self "(Gergen, 1991: 76) through exploring a selection of ideas, experiences and signifiers that are online and offline. Ellie noted that although she practiced her craft online it was clear that to her Witch performance was also offline.

"At some point, I definitely want to go outside, and you know just lie in the park or somewhere and just meditate for a bit. 'Cause that would be interesting experience and I feel like I would get more from it just being in nature as well, I feel like it would help ground you more as well." (Ellie)

Offline group performance was presented through online social media. The Instagram post from the Guardianofthegoddess (image 24) shows how the online community shares ideas and practise of their offline ritual. The image identifies some of the themes acknowledged in previous chapters. For example, belief in the Goddess, female empowerment, links to nature and following the Wheel of the Year[75]. What is more, posts such as this indicate that the Internet has become part of

[75] Wheel of the year is the cycle related to the festivals celebrated by witches. See glossary for information

the everyday (Campbell, 2013: Wagner, 2012) and is an enabler for reclaiming Witch. It is a safe space for the expression of Witch identities. Jenny noted that "There's no temples and things...I have turned up online forum saying I've never been interested in a problem before, what do I do? That's equivalent to me turning up at Church saying what do I do if I want to be a nun? You go and find the spaces online" (Jenny).

The Life History Narrative witches noted that there is an assumption in non-Pagan society that to become a witch, a person must take part in group-ritual through a coven such as that in Wicca. Yet this is not necessarily the case. There has been a growth of solitary witches who engage with a personalised form Witchcraft often because it is difficult to find a group of Pagans in the local area. Yet from the Life History interviews, it was evident that even if a witch was solitary by choice (11 out of the 13 witches practiced alone) they still, at some time during their becomings, felt the need to search for an offline spiritual group who had similar belief systems with whom they could learn and practice Witchcraft.

Bauman notes that people have a need to want to connect with other people. He identified this as "mixophilia" (2007: 90) but also noted that people find the process of mixing with large groups overwhelming because of the many differences of personalities and ideas. People therefore tend to create spaces where there is 'sameness' within the places of difference and find similar minded people. The following comments from Sally, Holly and David support Bauman's theory and the need to belong to a group.

"I've been looking for a Pagan group on here [social media]. I can't find any." (Sally)

"Years later I met someone else who was Pagan…we became friends and that was nice to have someone to talk about it because like I say it's quite a complex topic I suppose" (Holly)

"When my wife and I got together we did a ritual and it was good, she showed me what ... then we met these other people and did ritual" (David)

Zhang, Hook, Farrell, Mosher, Vaptari, Voomes, Tongeren and Davis' (2019) study about religious belonging noted that people had an improved feeling of wellbeing when they belonged to a religious group that was perceived to be homogenous i.e. 'like me' rather than diverse. The study identified specific characteristics of people who felt a sense of wellbeing when they belonged to a homogenous group and noted

"just like some will identify based on shared characteristics…religious groups may also identify, and extend greater social acceptance, based on shared convictions or practices…a strong sense of community provides a validation of one's beliefs, which likely leads individuals to old their beliefs with stronger conviction and vitality" (2019: 5).

Moreover, Zhang et al further explored how Intellectual Humility i.e. the ability to accept there are other ways of being and the ability to "navigate diverse environments" (2019: 5) supported the sense of wellbeing when a person belonged to a diverse or homogenous religious group. Applying the ideas of Zhang et al (2019) to the data for this thesis suggests that commenting on, sharing and re-tweeting social media posts that had similar content (i.e. signifiers of Witch) established social belonging within a disparate community. Furthermore, the idea of Intellectual

Humility may explain why most of the Life History Narrative witches kept searching for an offline group to practice with but also explored the online groups and community when the offline was found wanting. They felt attracted to offline homogenous groups because they felt less isolated, but also explored diverse online groups, so their thinking was challenged through accessing broader ideologies. It was their Intellectual Humility (the ability to acknowledge that there is more than one way to be a witch) that enabled them to maintain a sense of belonging in such a diversely ideological faith tradition.

Initially the offline groups were friendship groups but the Life History Narrative witches becomings evolved so that they joined an established coven, moot, Order or spiritual group and started to offer and lead training and ritual to others, thus establishing social belonging (Zhang et al, 2019) and a community of practice (Wenger, 2008). Tanya said that her reason for offering her knowledge to others was because she believed "that if you're going to call yourself a Priestess Witch whatever, you have to walk your talk…some of that is servicing your community in going out…and saying this is what I know - if it helps, you're good" (Tanya). The need to support the community and help others was a common sentiment amongst the Life History Narrative witches. All 13 witches had a disposition to want to assist and guide other people toward their own personal form of Witchcraft. Such behaviour exemplifies Rhizome Theory and in some instances Rhizome-Mycelium Theory[76] through the creation of a community of practice and social belonging.

[76] See chapter two and chapter seven for more detail about Rhizome-Mycelium Theory

Witches who share praxis within an online or offline community are examples of a rhizome. Through sharing knowledge with other people, they offer another approach to Witchcraft. They present their personalised understandings of The Craft, which they have gleaned from experiences and learning over time, consequently influencing other people's ideas of Witch. Witches therefore potentially initiate a new form of Witch identity within others and become a hub of knowledge, thus, exemplifying behaviours that were rhizomatic and mycelium. Mike's comment below is an example of Rhizome-Mycelium Theory. People came to Mike for knowledge about a range of things and he then used various platforms (plateaus) to share his understanding of The Craft, which in turn potentially affected other people's understanding of Witchcraft.

"I have started performing handfastings, I've started performing funerals. I've become a Celebrant... I started working, enabling rituals... introduction to the horned god evenings … I started running something called 'Witchish Walks' which are night time walks around nature areas in XX and no torches allowed, and we perform a brief ritual at end based on who is there... gives people introduction to group magic and it gives people an introduction to mindfulness. It gives an introduction to connections, the land." (Mike)

All 13 Life History Narrative witches engaged with rhizomatic behaviours meaning they all at some time connected with other witches (online and offline) and used the experiences to acquire new knowledge, which in turn sparked their interest in something else. Holly noted that learning from other people within a group situation and assimilating their knowledge to create a personalised sense of Witchcraft was usual behaviour for witches. She said, "For someone else to go 'this is my aspect of

the Craft' and to teach everyone that - it was like a revelation…it is nice to have a new skill and something else that you can use" (Holly).

Eight of the Life History Narrative witches engaged with Rhizome-Mycelium behaviours because each felt it important that they offered a personalised form of Witch and Witchcraft. They acknowledged that it was the community of practice that established what it meant to be a witch. Sharing knowledge established a sense of social belonging. For example, Jenny ran an online and offline moot, Felicity offered a fairy webpage, Mike an online blog, Holly became a 'mentor' within an online community, Ellie offered interpretations of tarot on Instagram, Lexie gave oracle readings in person, David led workshops about praxis and Tanya had a Facebook page that offered information and ritual about goddess workshop. Demonstrating therefore that creating rhizomes is a natural phenomenon in The Craft and creating new epistemologies and ontologies is the norm.

Creating a new mycelia path was not necessarily a conscious consideration of the Life History Narrative witches. Their main aim was to share what they knew so that others could be guided to become the witch they wanted to be. Their online input therefore became examples of online religion because at times they engaged with blogs and chat (Helland, 2002; 2005). However, in the main, most of the Life History Narrative witches participated with religion online because they usually lurked or used the online media as a repository of information, for a place to gather ideas of interest and learn about the Craft (ibid). They used social networking spaces to learn about The Craft for personal reasons rather than for becoming an influencer.

6.6 Performing Ritual

Whether solitary or in a group, it is understood a witch will perform ritual as part of their craft. They will use ritual objects, meditations and ceremony to mark certain points within the year or conduct ritual for a purpose. Ritualised behaviour is a common human phenomenon that interplays through identity practices within experiences of the everyday (Epp and Price, 2008). It is also a religious experience (Bell, 1992). Often objects are associated with performance so that the performed ritual establishes meaning for the group or individual and consequently, constructs identity formation (Price, 2013). The Life History Narrative witches used Witch signifiers such as incense, crystals and altars to celebrate points within the year through the performance of ritual. They took part in ritualised performance that reinforced what it meant to be a witch. As Kellie stated,

"We always get together at Hallowe'en and we light our candles... It was amazing this year... leaves and flowers we made headdresses. We had a fire going and M called it a witch's brew. She made it fun. I think there were apples and different stuff for that time it was really nice" (Kellie)

Ritual that is embedded into Witch practices is identity enactment. (Epp and Price, 2008: 51) A witch will perform Witch through the 'identity bundle' i.e. how they perform Witch within different situations they use (ibid). For example, a witch in an intimate coven may perform a ritual and attach meaning to an object in a different way to if they were alone or in a large festival. This means a witch will use group ritual to perform the coven identity but use personalised ritualised behaviours when alone. Both forms of ritual co-construct Witch and the ritual "serves as indicators of… membership" into Paganism (Epp and Price, 2008: 53). Although Witch is individualistic and ritualised, behaviours change to suit the situation and

circumstance. Ritual helps form personal Witch becomings and acceptance of non-essentialist Witch identity within the Pagan community.

Ritualised speech acts reinforce Witch identities and membership because they encourage a performance of Witch that establishes how to be a witch. When a witch conducts a ritual then the utterances used within it become an act that they expect to happen. It is not an assertion that something may happen, more an action that is happening in a specific context. For example, Felicity notes that she invokes spirits when she undertakes a ritual and conveys this meaning through stating 'you are welcome'.

"If we have a circle or something, just calling someone's name who might have passed or something... we always say you are welcome here" (Felicity)

Felicity's speech act suggests that spirits exist, they are present and, because they are welcome, they are friendly. Such utterance is an example of an illocutionary act (Austin, 1998) because the intent is that spirits will be invoked, and this intention is conveyed through the statement. Many witches use the illocutionary form of speech act to invoke spirit for example Holly says, "I'll call upon to spirits for ritual purposes". The spell is manifested through the intention that is spoken within the ritual.

Speech acts and ritual are also within social media and evidenced within the images that are shared. The intention is for the words to be uttered aloud and form a spell as is exemplified in image 29. Occasionally the language demonstrates illocutionary speech act because the intention is that if it is spoken aloud and the intention is there it will happen as is evidenced in images 25 and 26. However, some online posts are

examples of perlocutionary speech act, such as image 27 and 28, because they actualise the spell through physical action and speech. ‘S’mote it be’ is a common statement that is at the end of a spell and the intention is that when it is said the circumstance that is within the spell will be realised. Also, ‘Calling the corners’ is a common pagan ritual that is used to create a sacred space. It is also an example of an illocutionary speech act because the resolve is to invoke spiritual guardians within the North, East, South and West ‘corners’ of their circle so that a profane place can change into a more sacred space. However, once the ritual has been conducted the utterance becomes an example of a perlocutionary speech act (Austin, 1998): the act comes into being because of the speech. Therefore, performing ritual via speech acts and the intention of the witch establishes praxis and enables Witch becomings as is noted in image 29.

Koster (2003) suggests that ritual is related to territory and reclaiming space. The ordinary area is transformed into something extra-ordinary due to people performing ritualised behaviours within it. Consequently, the territory can be claimed and used for a different purpose other than originally perceived (Holloway, 2003; Sheldrake, 2007; David, 2012). Thus, the profane place becomes a sacred space using ritual and speech acts (David, 2012).

Possibly due to the lack of recognised and dedicated pagan sacred spaces, witches reclaim woodlands, stone circles and open spaces as places to conduct ritual. Hence, because of the belief in the power of the perlocutionary speech act where what you say is actualised (Austin, 1998), a witch can perform magic anywhere, thus the speech act within the ritual is an important element to becoming Witch.

"I don't personally feel I need a physical space to do that [create or perform a spell] ... I could sit here I often lie in bed and I'm going to sleep, and I just visualise us in a bubble…I don't need a physical space to do that I do it where I lie" (Grace)

The Life History Narrative interviews also illustrated that a witch fashions an individualistic craft when they use speech act utterances. They blend what they have learned through study with their personal belief systems and creativity. They therefore create a hybridised ritual. The example from Sienna illustrates how she reflects on how to customise an established ritual from Wicca.

"I've got a calendar that's got all the Wiccan celebrations on it and when it comes to a special celebration, I look it up and think how can we mark it? Can we mark it with special food, or I think it's nice just to stop sometimes to see the passing of the year" (Sienna)

Kellie acknowledged that she liked to create new rituals with Grace. She said "We sat down once, and we cast a circle and [said] like what should we do? Do we like a peace one? So, we tried to conduct a peace ceremony" (Kellie). If Kellie had shared her ritual with others via social media for example, then her comment would be an example of mycelium behaviours because she is potentially creating a new ontology and ritual. Yet although her ritual involved speech act utterances, it was not shared online with people other than Grace, therefore ritual was personal and only an example of rhizome theory. What can be taken from these examples however is that ritual is expected to evolve and be altered by the witch to make the intention personal and the outcome from the spell work actualised. The adaption of ritual adds to the journey into becoming Witch.

Speech act theory influences a personal, custom-built craft because it is embedded in the ritualised behaviours of spell casting. What is more, the use of speech acts within personalised spell and ritual has the potential for Rhizome-Mycelium behaviours to form. This is because a witch may feel compelled to share their praxis online and the post is then infinitely shared. Within each new online encounter, the speech act morphs into a slightly adapted spell or ritual. Hence the person who created the original speech act inadvertently affects the becomings of others. This happens through the double click decisions individuals take to discover the original post and the rhizomatic pathways that formed as a result within the plateaus of social networking spaces.

6.7 Othering Witch

The final theme of this chapter is othering. The Life History Narrative witches identified that some felt they were othered by people in the community as has been identified in chapter five. Penny intimated in her Life History Narrative that Witch stories within the family were avoided for fear of reprisals and being a witch was a secret that was not shared with many.

"My mum did dabble more than she let on. I think she was hiding it she didn't want to admit it. My grandma well she dabbled you know…stories would come down through the line. So maybe we are a line of them [witches] over the years" (Penny)

David felt that identifying as a witch meant he would always be a target. He felt that being part of a minority, especially if group behaviours were non-normative (such as engaging with ritualised nudity for a way to connect with the god and goddess)

would mean that he would be the other and that othering is related to power and control.

"There are people who just make things up you know... if you're nude you must be having sex. No, you can have nudity without having sex… It's demonizing things saying this is good this is bad because they want to control" (David)

Revell (2014) suggests that othering is related to power narratives that create stereotypes and lead to the isolation of those groups who are alien to the norm. This links to the concept of Orientalism raised by Said in 1978 and as formed many of the ideas related to the othering of Islam (Silva, 2017: 140). Said (1978) explored the systems that created the 'them' and 'us' mentality, arguing that the West sees themselves differently to others hence creates a dynamic where the West is considered to be a better culture than the East (Said, 1978: 252). Such false ideas are repeated through power narratives and reified in media (Silva 2017).

Additionally, othering has happened mainly with non-normative minority groups (such as Muslims) resulting in discrimination. Similarly, Satanists are also targets for othering because of non-normative practices that instil misunderstandings and stereotypes about what it means to be one (Harvey, 2009). As has been discussed in chapter three and chapter four, there is a witch stereotype that creates misunderstandings about Witchcraft. Because witches have non-normative practices and rituals, a witch will be considered an outsider. Consequently, a witch is likely to be feared and othered, hence many do not wish to publicly share their Witch identity.

Arsal and Yavuz (2014: 169) suggest that witches have become targets for othering because of the heuristic of God being good and the Devil as evil within monotheistic

religions. This binary position creates confusion when associated with occult practices and thus the witch identity has been a scapegoat for ill-fated events in history. Witch identities have been offered as women who are evil and with the Devil, rather than pure and with God (ibid, 2014: 171). This conviction has led to the demonising of women, witches and rituals associated with Witchcraft (Arsul et al, 2014: 177). The comment by Kiaoragirl (image 30) argues against the limited Christian understandings of Paganism. Furthermore, image 31a and image 31b include sensationalised headlines that suggest historical markings on a heritage site as the gateway to hell (Brown, 2019). Both posts reify the Witch stereotype as evil. Boyd's article about the musical *Wicked* acknowledges the stereotype of Witch but also argues that the musical "can be read as an allegory for more recent, even current political events" (2010: 98). The media, she argues, has always presented a witch as wicked and although some mediatised witches, such as Samantha Stephens in the television series Bewitched, are empowered and more sanguine, there is still an underlying understanding of the evil witch within society. A witch is inherently bad and Witchcraft with practices in the occult are innately evil. Consequently, a witch will always be performed as the othered because the identity trope is still attached to the derogatory (Boyd, 2010: 104). Boyd concludes to say that "the modern world is still a difficult place for a witch" (ibid, 2010: 114) and so will always be a societal scapegoat and an outcast.

In the Life History Narrative interviews however, David and Sienna suggested that the non-normative nature of Witch was what appealed to them. Furthermore, being different from expected norms and being an outcast, was what they celebrated. For them, becoming a witch and using Witch signifiers was a form of activist-feminism and an opportunity to fight against oppression through the "performance of alterity"

(Harvey 2009: 27).

"I don't care as much what people say. I quite like that thought of being seen as a little bit nuts! Whereas when I was younger, I wouldn't want to be seen as a little bit nuts and dotty whereas now I don't really care. In fact, I quite like it! I want the freedom!" (Sienna)

"[talking about why decided to become Witch] The only ways women could use their brains in a certain time in history and make a living - being independent financial women and using their intelligence, which appeals to me obviously" (Sienna)

"Rebelling and rebelling a bit more…they are against it, I'm for it!…I was never in! I was a hippy. I'm very strange." (David)

Conversely, alterity not only happens between Witch and wider Western society but also occurs within some branches of Paganism, thus demonstrating elements of outwith i.e. a witch is an insider but also an outsider to the traditions (Cowan, 2006). The Wiccan creed establishes exclusivity within the coven and encourages an attitude of 'them and us' that has the potential to other non-initiated witches and Wiccans. As Jenny alluded in her Life History Narrative, some Wiccan practices and pledges are kept secret from those who have not yet been accepted and initiated into the coven. Jenny's comment suggests a community that is particular about the characteristics of a potential witch. She said at the start of the interview that there were certain things in her narrative that she would not be able to share with me because of her commitment to her coven.

The coven pledges not to share what happens in ritual with those who are not part of the coven. The understanding is that secrecy within a group creates a close-knit community that is built on trust, again adhering to social belonging (Zhang et al,

2019). Yet this secrecy, although it is considered positive by the initiated (because it can create solidarity), has created distrust amongst those who are not Wiccans or are in training to be Wiccan. The consequence to the closed nature of the coven, according to Jenny, has been a decline in initiates because it takes a year and a day to become a Wiccan and this is too slow for the millennial generation.

Furthermore, secrecy has caused harassment and persecution with the wider community because there has been a lack of understanding of what a witch is, consequently stereotypes prevail. As a result, some witches have used social media to address the stereotype threat of Witch, as is demonstrated in the social networking post displayed in image 32 from secretivewitch that quotes Margot Adler. Abdel-Fadil suggests that religious minorities access media when they experience the other and social networking spaces reflect the binary position (2019: 286).

Interestingly, this secretive position has potentially been overturned through online communities. Explicit details of Wiccan Rites and practice have been published in the open source network and consequently begun to demystify the myths related to witches. Social networking spaces have potentially removed hierarchies. This is a sentiment by many of the Life History Narrative witches and is seen as a positive outcome for modern witches because it offers opportunity to share and create whilst still practicing alone (Dawson, 2005: 2), which is possibly a construct of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2007).

Garcia-Penalvo (2018) argues that having a utopian ideology where Internet use leads to egalitarianism and social inclusion is not entirely possible because old problems (often related to ethics) remain and need to be resolved. Thus, for witches

in the 21st century, although Internet use has been an enabler for witch becomings, the problems of authenticity, authority, and Witch identities need to be considered. Yet for many self-identified witches, whether someone becomes Witch through offline or online practices is not fundamental to a personalised journey into Witchcraft and Witch. Witch becomings happen through personal performance of Witch that moves a self-identified witch further along their journey into Witch discoveries and awareness of self.

Summary of the Chapter

21st century witches post and share praxis offering a more liquid modern Witch identity that is self-created, self-designed and influenced by the communities and individuals housed within social networking spaces, hence the technology is an enabler for identities and "can provide valuable spaces for identity play" (Turkle, 2004: 2). Performances of Witch are part of identity creation and are "reflexively crafted, organised, sustained and revised" (Fachin and Denvil, 2015: 369). Bell identifies a problem however because she claims the websites "project an image of the self" (Bell, 2001: 117; 124) thus people are performing multiple identities that are not necessarily real. Furthermore, those who explore multiple identities may "find it harder to develop authentic selves" (Turkle, 2004: 2). However, it may be that the Internet offers a safe space for identity play and reconstruction of the self. Simultaneously exploring more than one identity may be more authentic to one's true nature because multiple identities reflect both the inner and outer self. Thus, the online performances of Witch become the tools for constructions of Witch, and the performativities of Witch, through images, videos, Witch signifiers, rituals and othering, are the enablers to deconstruct and reconstruct future selves.

This chapter has identified that Witch becomings are constructed through identity performances. Such performances enable individuals to play with Witch signifiers in solitary or group ritual within spaces that allow them to confirm their authentic Witch selves. Such spaces are often offline but may also be online. The becomings happen through a witch's performance of practiced ritual through speech acts that invoke intention. Having discussed how people perform Witch the final sections of this thesis summarises the data and concludes with considerations on how people construct their Witch becomings.

Chapter Seven: Becoming Witch (Discussion)

> "I truly believe everybody has their own truth, and truths are often a result of the social situation that we live in or the way that we have been brought up" (Tanya)

> "[Rhizome is] An amorphous collection of juxtaposed pieces that can be joined together in an infinite number of ways" (Deleuze and Guattari 2013: 554)

In this chapter I draw conclusions that classify the becomings of self-identified witches and consider how they interact with social networking spaces. This study identifies how self-identified witches used social networking spaces to create a personal reality of Witch and Witchcraft. This broad objective was addressed in chapter two and has been narrowed into three research aims that are:

1. To identify how people become Witch through the various online and offline connections that they make
2. To understand the extent to which social networking spaces encourage, reinforce and/or create Witch identities
3. To understand how people use social networking spaces to create their own realities of the self

The structure of this chapter directly addresses the three research aims and offers conclusions into how, and why, self-identified witches use online connections along their spiritual journey to become Witch. Moreover, I explain how my innovation of the theoretical framework Rhizome-Mycelium Theory is a useful model for understanding how to become Witch and how social networking spaces are

'plateaus' for individuals to gain information about Witch (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 23). The first concept that is discussed is the Rhizome-Mycelium framework (which I have developed from Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome Theory) and how it can be applied to the findings in this thesis. Next, I discuss how social networking places and spaces are enablers for Witch becomings. Finally, I explore how interactions within social networking spaces confirm the self.

7.1 Aim One: To identify how people become Witch through the various online and offline connections

Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome Theory has been used in a wide selection of research fields that have been discussed in detail within chapter two and which have been specifically applied to studies associated with the Internet (Buchanan, 2007; Lim, 2014). Accordingly, my study uses aspects of Rhizome Theory to help explain how people interact online, but I also merge this theory with Actor Network Theory (Latour, 1999) with the aim to theorise more specifically, some of the arboreal networks that were discovered in the dataset. I conclude that the concept of a rhizome should be attributed more to the use of online social spaces rather than the social platform itself. This conclusion is different to the literature in this field because scholars such as Landow (2006) suggest that the Internet is a rhizome, but I argue that it is the click decisions of the individual inhabiting the online social spaces that are rhizomatic and not necessarily the place of the Internet or social platform. This idea will be explored in further detail later within this chapter.

Deleuze and Guattari acknowledged that they believed their seminal text[77] to be an "open system. It does not have the final word" (2013: xii) suggesting that the book itself is in a state of becoming because the ideas contained are at an in-between state that is in constant flux. The book is a taproot of a rhizome and connects to other concepts and ideas and the content has the potential to connect to a wide selection of ideas and develop into something different. This means the ideas are a rhizome that will alter and change. The book is a "root-book" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 3) "an assemblage… it is a multiplicity" (2013: 2). Knowing this, there is an expectation from the authors therefore that the research will develop into something new after publication. They expected their ideas to be absorbed and assimilated into a new 'line of flight' (2013: 9) and so their book is a plateau that encourages the creation of future rhizomes. I posit therefore that this thesis is also a rhizome that has built on Deleuze and Guattari's root-book and my innovation of Rhizome-Mycelium Theory is the natural direction to take from it.

To understand Rhizome-Mycelium Theory, it is necessary to explain how witches use social media. Figure 2 (which is also image 4) is a visual representation of Rhizome-Mycelium Theory. It has been created from data analysis and is divided into two main sections that are symbolic of the Celtic Tree of Life that is a popular Pagan image as is demonstrated in images 1, 2, 3a and within the blog *Buzzfeed*. There is an upper section that represents a tree and a lower element that represents

[77] Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) book, *A Thousand Plateaus*. New York Bloomsbury (pages Vii – 27) has become a seminal text for studies related to a wide selection of research in particular Rhizome Theory, cyborg, becomings

the roots.[78] The model exemplifies the way a witch may navigate through social media so that they actualise their understanding of Witch.

I interpret the upper part of the model in Figure 2 to represent the infrastructures that support networking within social media. They are the spaces within the social media platforms (plateaus) where a person can share, like, post and comment on ideas and concepts. The fixed striated structures enable the connections and the embedded hyperlinks, entice further exploration.

The lower part of the model in Figure 2 represents the rhizomatic pathways a person may follow. It illustrates the themes that were of interest and explored by the witches within this study. It exemplifies how a self-identified witch is online and starts to explore a social media platform. During the exploration they decide to click on something that is of personal interest to them. They then continue to click and follow appealing hyperlinks that are embedded in the various sites. The result is that they create nomadic pathways that are not planned and are arboreal. The individual creates a bricolage of experiences and information.

Finally, the mushroom-like shape on the left of the middle line in Figure 2 represents mycelium, i.e. a person who has the potential to be an influencer within social media and has created a new witch identity. They create their own network of pathways and

[78] I chose to organise the model in this way because I felt that the structure of networks was similar to the branches of a tree. The upper branches are obvious networks and demonstrate the social media sites that link to Paganism. The roots however are what are not as obvious and relate to the organic personal click connections within the networks that are rhizomatic.

encourage rhizomatic behaviours. All three sections work in tandem with each other, are symbiotic and essential for Witch becomings.

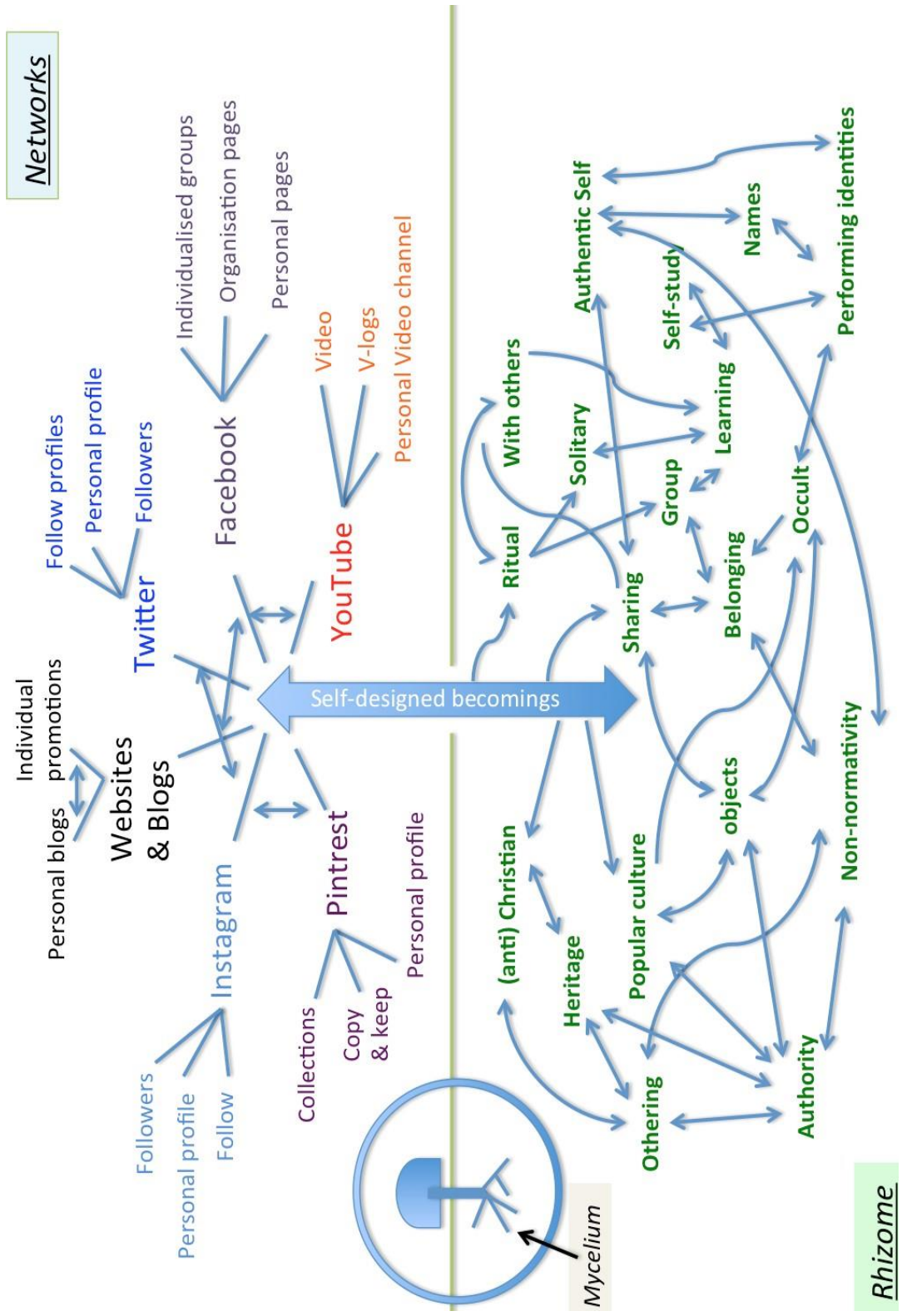


Figure 2: Diagram of Theoretical Framework: Rhizome-Mycelium Theory (image 4)

7.1.1 Social Networks

The upper portion of the model demonstrates the online social networks that a person interacts with. It represents the structure of a social network such as Facebook or Instagram and is akin to a tree diagram. An individual will navigate around a social networking platform and move from one page or post to another using the infrastructures, such as search engines, hyperlinks and comment boxes, as a navigation guide. Moreover, it is unlikely a witch will limit their social networking to one social place because the embedded hyperlinks entice them to explore their interest in a different direction. Therefore, the witch is likely to click on a link that will take them to another social platform and space that has similar content.

The travel through the digital place is striated, arboreal, linear and complex because it can go in any direction depending on the choice of click.[79] Thus, an individual may use the discussions and information in the social spaces to find out about Witch identities by initially clicking on a post about witches and then moving to a hyperlink that takes them to another site such as Instagram. This in turn has another link that takes them to YouTube or Pinterest. The infrastructure is such that it is usual to see embedded hashtags and hyperlinks when exploring an issue of interest and follow lines of thought (Alinejad, Candidatu, Mevsimler, Minchilli, Ponzanesi and Ven der, 2019) thus the platform naturally encourages further exploration that is structured. More importantly, it is not only the active surfing that impacts the construction of Witch identities but the push notifications and algorithms that track the surfing and suggest alternate pathways to explore (Campbell, 2018). Therefore, the pathways are both sought after by the individual but also offered by the technology.

[79] See Aim two later in this chapter for a model that explains this process in more detail.

The movement through a social platform is relatively straightforward because the purpose of social networking is to connect people within the digital place. Hence the structures of the platforms are not necessarily rhizomatic because the infrastructure and individual networks can be re-created. It is better therefore to relate the connections to Actor Network Theory (ANT) than Rhizome Theory because ANT identifies the links actors make between each other, and Rhizome Theory explores how the networks are developed in an organic, nomadic way.

In my study, the witches explored Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, personal Witch Blogs, some aspects of Second Life, Pinterest and Pagan Websites hence the social media became plateaus to study epistemologies and ontologies of Witch. All 13 Life History Narrative witches explored more than one social networking platform, although three did note that they preferred one platform to another. Social networking platforms therefore were the techne for Becoming Witch i.e. they helped craft Witch identities.

In addition to the techne of the digital platform, whatever was read or experienced online had some effect on the perceptions and understandings of Witch, hence personal investments were made between the digital connections (Alinejad et al 2019: 24). Bunt argues that social media is "embedded into the thought actions and activities of key individuals and groups" (2018: 34); consequently, the lower section of the theoretical framework model demonstrates the themes explored by the Life History Narrative witches, that were also revealed within the online posts. These

themes created a rhizome because the pathways were non-linear due to being self-initiated by the witch and thus enabled Witch becomings.

7.1.2 Rhizome

The bottom half of the model in Figure 2 represents a rhizome that is linked to the branches of social media platforms. It presents the themes that developed from this study whilst I engaged with the process of Netnography (Kozinets, 2010) and from the Life History Narrative interviews.

To become Witch individuals engaged with online discussions, and reflections that in turn affected understandings of Witch and Witchcraft. Experiences helped individuals form a Witch schema and this formation was driven by personal interest in specific Witch themes. Hence becomings were self-designed because the individual engaged in seemingly random movement through online platforms and social spaces, yet this nomadic travel developed into an actualised Witch identity or an awareness of multiple Witch identities.

To illustrate, a person moved through a selection of conceptual spaces within the online places such as images, videos, posts to gather ideas that were of interest to them. They reflected and then assimilated the ideas into their developing identity of a witch. The direction of the journey through the various social networking spaces was dependent on the person's intention. Unlike the pathway through the structures of the social places (i.e. Facebook, Instagram), the navigation through the digital social spaces (i.e. video, images, text) was not linear.

It was through the navigation process i.e. clicking into a personal blog and looking at how a specific community explores ritual and then a hyperlinking on YouTube to see a video of how people perform magic for example, where a person developed their knowledge of Witch and Witchcraft. The path to becoming was individualistic and personal to the witch. To further illustrate this point, a person may choose to log into Pinterest and explore how to create an altar and perform a ritual for a witch's Sabbat. They then decide to investigate YouTube videos and v-logs to discover how to engage in solitary ritual. During and after experiencing the online content they evaluate what ritual meant to them personally. Conversely, another individual may share a post from Twitter and then hyperlink to look at the heritage of witches and Witchcraft. They explore individual stories of belonging. It was clear from the Life History Narrative interviews that each witch's pathway was self-chosen and unique. Yet more so, reflection on the experiences that they had that supported the becomings of the witch who was navigating the path.

There is not one way to become a witch, hence the pathways were nomadic and rhizomatic. Also, the starting point was exclusive to each person, hence becomings could not be re-created as a template for another person to follow. The journey through the social spaces was chaotic and complex and did not seem to have a start or end. Therefore, the pathways to becoming Witch were personal and related to the intention of the witch rather than the structure of the online platform. The non-striated path to actualising a personal Witch identity became an assemblage of seemingly random connections that the individual accommodated and assimilated into their existing understandings of Witch. This became an example of polyphonic bricolage (Schmidt, 2003: 10) and multiphrenic self (Gergen, 1997: 76) as has been

explored in other areas within this thesis. These rhizomatic behaviours and this model therefore exemplify the episteme to becoming Witch.

7.1.3 Mycelium

The final section is related to the mushroom-like shape on the left of the model and sitting on the central line. This is an example of mycelium. In nature, a rhizome (root system of a tree) spreads in the direction of its nutrients and is dependent on top growth. Hence, the tree is important to the rhizome because the tree connects to the rhizomatic roots, and the soil provides nutrients to the rhizome and tree. Using this metaphor, the underground system of a rhizome cannot happen without the upper-ground network of a tree, hence, Witch cannot happen without the tree of Paganism and the networks of its branches with roots that establish belief and praxis. Furthermore, Witch gains nurture from the context a person is in, therefore the context in my study would be a social networking space such as a discussion forum in a Facebook group or in an offline coven. There is a symbiotic relationship between a rhizome and a tree, and this is replicated in the symbiotic connections made between the pagan networks within the social spaces and the rhizomatic behaviours of users that offer a selection of Witch identities and in turn enable Witch becomings.

However, mycelium is fungi and fungal spores can move metres away from the tree and survive by creating a new colony and a fungal underground network. The mycelium will gain nutrients from the soil that surrounds it, but it also creates carbon dioxide that offers nutrients back to the tree thus feeds the tree. They are part of the tree but a separate hub. Using this metaphor for my study, there are some cases where a self-identified witch creates a new form of Witch identity and Witchcraft

that develop into a hybridised form of Paganism. They self-actualise, as Witch and Pagan but the identities are distinct from the more traditional pagan pathways such as Wicca or Druid. Hence the individual offers something new to the concept of Witch that encourages the continued evolution of the faith and Witch becomings.

To illustrate, a witch may have presented their ideas on Instagram or YouTube and gained thousands of followers, who then fed back in comment boxes what they learned from the Instagram witch, and re-shared the posts. The witch who they followed potentially became an influencer (Zappaviga, 2014; Ward, 2017) and was acknowledged as having authority in Witchcraft by the online community. This person presented a new form of Witch identity, which then fed back to the idea of what Witch could be and challenged the hegemonic view of Witch identity.

My study has identified that some self-identified witches on social media have engaged in social networking and have become examples of Mycelium-witch and Celebrity-witch. They are hubs that link to Paganism but offer a hybridised form of Witchcraft that is individualistic. Hence the Witchcraft could be a blend of Wicca and Druid principles with occult practices and includes references to images or spells that have been gleaned and reused from popular culture such as films. The idea has been explored in more detail within chapter five where witches have claimed authority and chapter six with the performance of Witchcraft and Witch.

7.1.4 Personalised Witch Becomings

Moving on, the previous section noted in that becoming Witch is categorised into three sections. The next discussion will explain how the Rhizome-Mycelium

behaviours enable Witch identities. As has been previously noted, becoming Witch is constructed. It begins with an individual choosing to log into a social media platform for a specific reason and further exploration is then self-directed and driven by personal curiosity.

The initial logging into the social media is the start of the rhizomatic behaviour and is linked to the primary reason the witch decided to search a hashtag or group. Henceforth the exploration within the social networking space develops into nomadic thought that is seemingly random but is essentially guided by intrinsic interest. The witch moves through the original platform and other social networking spaces using hashtags, URLs, links to other groups and people. The gathering of information fuels their initial reason for logging on and it develops their existing knowledge. The behaviours of the 13 Life History Narrative witches were directed by their interest in learning something specific, although other cyber-witches may have explored social networking spaces for other reasons that are not transparent from looking at their online profile.

Through the exploratory nomadic navigation within the spaces, the witches cultivate what it means to be a witch. For example, a person may enter Instagram and find information about how people celebrate a Sabbat such as the summer Solstice. They then click and hyperlink into Pinterest to explore how the festival is celebrated in different ways by collating a selection of images and create a visual board that illustrates what they see as significant. The learning about the Solstice is self-directed and initiated from self-interest. The digital board becomes a montage of a personal approach to the festival.

Self-study is a component of Witchcraft (Hutton, 2004) that aims for the creation of a personalised praxis. The motivation for learning therefore was so they could develop their Witch self. The intrinsic motivation to learn about Witch supported the becomings because the learning was transformative (Illeris, 2018) and developed a sense of belonging (Shepherd, Penuel and Pellegrino, 2018). This then suggests that rhizomatic behaviours occurred because of the intrinsic interest and motivation of the witch along with the online community of practice that was offered within the social networking spaces. The online community offered a space within the digital place that encouraged the exploration of personalised identity formations and enabled Witch becomings.

However, mapping the rhizomatic behaviours that contribute to Witch becomings is problematic because they are naturally chaotic, complex and unique to each individual witch and consequently impossible to replicate (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013). It was difficult therefore to decipher the original intention and motivation of logging on and thus retrace the direction of the becomings. Yet it is possible to conclude that the behaviours that were demonstrated by the Life History Narrative witches enabled them to begin to assimilate and accommodate what they knew about Witch. This happened through the social media offering a plateau and a place to network. The plateau enabled them to build personal epistemologies and personalised praxis.

Furthermore, the social spaces within the plateau helped to confirm personal persuasions about what a witch was. The acknowledgement that there were people

like me (Massey, 2005) with familiar belief systems in the social sphere provided a sense of belonging to the Life History Narrative witches (for example Kelly, Grace, Ellie, Lexie and Holly) and assurance that they were correct in their understandings of Witch.

Engaging with digital media can be beneficial to identity formation because it offers a platform for people to share what they perceive to be their authentic self (DiMaggio, 2001: 318). Individuals presented and performed varying identities online and consequently offered alternative non-normative pathways for those who felt marginalised. Furthermore, social networking spaces created communal identities that supported personalised becomings, and imbued confidence for people to 'come out of broom closet'. However, Massey (2005: 95) suggests that social networking spaces are akin to gated communities because people follow others who are similar, hence ideas, belief systems and ideologies are not challenged. Yet the data in my thesis noted that witches confirmed their witch self through observing ritual of witches, reading about praxis and communicating with other witches. The interactions supported personalised witch becomings because they instilled reflexivity that developed self-awareness (Wagner, 2012: 102). Hence being part of a like-minded community still challenged personal understandings of Witch because within similar groups there were still variations on what a witch was, and agreement that any way to Witch was acceptable.

Becoming Witch is not a solitary journey, even if a person chooses to practice alone. Each of the witches in my study acknowledged that online and offline their interactions with others had a significant impact on their praxis. They felt that

whether it was online or offline, learning how other witches conducted a spell or ritual and discussing pagan ideologies helped them on their journey to become Witch. Interactions offered individuals the potential to create a hybridised and personalised pagan spirituality that reflected their multiphrenic self (Gergen, 1991: 76). For example, they were able to take part in aspects of an established tradition such as Wicca without directly belonging to a coven and still be able to practice alone and be accepted as a witch. The identity was constructed from their experiences from their past and present and was exemplified through the adjectives they included with the term Witch, for example White witch, Green witch, Druid witch, Dianic witch, Buddhist witch. Thus, they created a title and identity that reflected their personalised approach to becoming Witch (Belous and Bauman, 2017).

Witch becomings develop through entering a rhizome at any point that is related to their personal interest within a social networking space (see Figure 2) and interacting with the presented material that has been posted by other witches. Witch represented identities within social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram through media that was textual, visual, film or podcasts. They offered a plethora of epistemologies and ontologies of Witch. The online posts sparked ideas related to Witch praxis and directed users towards another space or individual that would enable them to reflect on their own personal belief and truths. Thus, the intention for the post was to nurture some form of interaction (be that to watch, repost, share or read) and engage in rhizomatic behaviours to self-learn about Witchcraft and witches. The gathering of information and engaging with posts confirmed the potential of Witch because the repeated behaviours and performances of Witch

created agreement within the community about what Witch was and was not (Greenough, 2018). Moreover, they fostered a bespoke form of Witch and Witchcraft so that the user could decide to either challenge and recreate the witch stereotype or confirm what they already felt Witch to be. These rhizomatic behaviours stimulated self-constructed Witch identities and inspired Witch becomings.

What is also interesting to acknowledge is that some of the Life History Narrative witches gained confidence during their becoming Witch and decided to share what they knew about The Craft and what it meant to be Witch. They created a social networking blog, video or group chat and shared their knowledge with a wider community.[80] This behaviour was an example of a mycelium because the witch had decided to offer an epistemology and ontology of Witch and present it as a particular truth. Hence, they would be considered by the online community, as having an authority of Witch. Yet because their learning about Witch and Witchcraft was self-taught through engaging in online rhizomatic behaviours, some of the Life History Narrative witches questioned the authority over the knowledge that was being shared and the authenticity of the witch. This is a common discussion point that is also raised by Cowan (2005) and Bunt (2018).

Social networking spaces "sometimes subverts traditional models of religious authority and offers alternative approaches and information" (Bunt, 2018: 3) and this is due to the immediacy of information provided by digitally literate individuals and the formation of group discussions about pagan praxis that advocate a personalised fluid Witch identity. Yet what is more, the 'cut and paste' and 'pick n mix' approach

[80] Ellie, Jenny and Tanya created websites and blogs

to spiritualities that can be problematic for traditional religions such as Islam for example (Bunt 2018: 77) are not necessarily a complication for Paganism. This is because of the egalitarian attitude of the various pagan pathways (Harvey, 1997) and the fluid nature of Witch becomings. The content that is presented by self-identified witches may offer an alternative truth and interpretation of Witchcraft and eventually evolve into another established path of Paganism, which would be the natural progression of a Rhizome-Mycelium witch. More importantly, there is no set dogma in Paganism hence having a personalised faith that breeds a new Witch and new ontologies of Witchcraft is an accepted part of the foundation of what it means to be Pagan and may strengthen the faith tradition (Pearson, 2003).

The decision to stand apart and present a personal Witch truth therefore means that the individual is not only an example of mycelium, and spreads new ideas through the social media network, but is also an example of a new rhizome. This is because they have created connections and ideas that relate to other Pagan truths but are not necessarily a direct part of it. The Rhizome-Mycelium witch encourages the Pagan pathways to evolve further and offer even more opportunities of Witch identities. This is particularly evident in celebrity witches who have created a popular form of Witchcraft (Ezzy, 2003a) and may appeal to those who prefer a non-serious approach to Witchcraft (Coco and Woodward, 2007). Yet whether someone identifies as a witch because of the influence of witches who present popularist witchcraft; the performance of Witch within popular culture, or through the appeal of an organised pathway is inconclusive. However, my data does suggest becomings are related to how individuals play with Witch identities that are presented in performance, popular

culture and established pathways so that they create their own Multiphrenic-Witch (Gergen, 1991: 76).

Social networking spaces offer a safe area for identity play (Herminia et al, 2010) and performativities of Witch (Butler, 1988). The witches in my study had a playful attitude with some of the signifiers of Witch, such as the conical hat and broom, with the purpose of rehearsing possible future selves. They would playfully use the stereotype of a witch to either challenge the patriarchy (Rountree, 1997), or to acknowledge the person they currently were, and then play with the other stereotypes that they could to reflexively discover the witch they wanted to be (Fachin and Devael, 2015). Each witch in this study unbecame an identity to enable the becoming of a new one (Sumsion, 2007). They played with multiple roles, constructing their personalised witch-self in the process.

7.1.5 Potential Impact of Rhizome-Mycelium Theory

Secularisation debates suggest that people's affiliation to a god and a religion is on the decline and that people are more secular in the 21st century. However, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) amongst others argue that people are becoming more spiritual, rather than less. Affiliation to a religious practice in the 21st Century is fluid and pluralistic (Casanova, 2019) and traditional religion has evolved to include digital religious practice and social media (Helland, 2002; 2005; Hojsgaard and Warburg, 2005; Miller, Mundey and Hill, 2013; Bunt, 2009; 2018) hence people are exploring their faith in a way that has not necessarily been the established and a traditional mode of religious practice. Rhizome-Mycelium Theory therefore may be a useful

tool to analyse how anyone who has a faith (be that alternative or otherwise), uses digital media to create a personalised faith identity. It may offer another lens to the secularisation debate and add to the debates about the growth of spirituality and the absence of a theistic worldview.

Furthermore, Rhizome-Mycelium Theory can be used to explore how new religious movements are formed. Although there is much discussion in how new religious movements happen (See for example Dawson, 2012; Barker, 2014) the mycelium of the theoretical framework suggests that there are individuals who promote a type of faith expression that is an evolution of established paths, yet they did not intend to start a grass-roots religious movement. Starting a new faith movement is one of the outcomes of celebrity cyber-witches and so it would be interesting to explore whether this phenomenon is applicable to other faith traditions or any other religious movements.

Finally, Rhizome-Mycelium Theory has demonstrated that people construct liquid modern spiritualities. Religious identities are not purely related to religious dogma, practice and church attendance but are fluid and transition into non-static personalised belief systems (Filiciak, 2003). The spiritualities are not created in a way that is pick n mix but more a bricolage that is a blend of culture, experience, heritage, reflexivity and praxis to gain an authentic spiritual self (Schmidt, 2003: 10). This being the case, Rhizome-Mycelium Theory can be a model that may be used to identify how individuals blend traditional religious practice and dogma with personalised spiritualities and praxis and how that forms a faith identity that is Christian, for example, but is multifaceted.

Rhizome-Mycelium Theory could be applied in other areas of the field of religion to gain an understanding on how someone develops a faith identity. We cannot assume faith identities are static: religions must evolve otherwise they disappear. If this is the case, then it makes sense to accept that faith identities should also change and develop. Yet a changing faith identity may be problematic for some established religions. This is because once initiated into the faith through a Rite of Passage the individual is given a title that comes with an established faith identity. That individual is then expected to perform said identity through their observance of set dogma and guidance. It would be interesting for future research to reflect on how many people follow the dogma in a rigid fashion and whether they adapt it slightly because of modern day influences, such as social media, and then to what extent this interaction has affected their faith identity.

The problem lies with the assumptions that once a person is given a faith identity and presented with dogma the initiate knows how to be Christian, be Muslim or be a Jew. The assumption is that there is a fixed identity. However, a person is never being – they are always becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013). It is important therefore to challenge pre-conceived ideas of what it means to be-something. Rhizome-Mycelium Theory can be the theoretical framework that is used to explore how a Christian strengthens their personal faith or relationship with God within social networking spaces to become devout for example. Furthermore, it can support analysis of how people become celebrity or how nomadic rhizomatic behaviours can create authority within a learning community.

7.2 Aim Two: To understand the extent to which social networking spaces encourage, reinforce and/or create Witch identities

The second aim of my thesis explores the extent to which social networking spaces encourage, reinforce and/or create spiritual identities. Because identity formation is both conceptual and a process that is constructed from experiences (McCarthy, 2002: 29) becoming Witch within social networking spaces means people are constantly shaping and re-shaping who they want to be and who they feel they already are. They form identities by posting on social media and connecting with people for knowledge exchange. They also learn from posts by following like-minded people on Instagram or Twitter and creating or/and joining social networks where they develop a sense of belonging to a community.

The online surfing, sharing, following and posting is used to craft a witch identity and perform the witch they currently are or wish to be. Hence an individual is constantly creating their witch identity, which is frequently altered due to new online posts, shares and surfing experiences. Crafting the witch therefore, is personal to the individual and enables a witch identity that is unique, but which has been influenced by the networks and in part co-constructed by the users. Yet to fully understand the process it is important to review how the social networking spaces are used, because digital places and spaces are not only briefly visited but also inhabited. Many people live their ideal selves online, presenting and performing their witch-selves into existence (Stern, 2003).

As has been discussed in chapter three, Tuan (1977) argues that the concept of ‘space’ is understood through appreciating that the experiences and interactions a

person has within a place affect the attachment they have with it. Place is physical, and space is conceptual. Both place and space can be connected to the same location. For example, social networking platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are digital places that people visit but the space is conceptualised differently by the user. From the analysis of the dataset, it was clear that the digital place facilitated interactions through its infrastructure with social tools such as having the opportunity to like, share and comment and that the digital space encouraged personal and group reflections on experiences. Place supported the conceptualisation of the space. This is important to consider for Witch becomings because a person will use the physical social platform to interact with others and then employ its features to reflect on and perform their witch identities. The social place becomes for some, an open safe space to explore personal reflections of witch-self, which in turn enable Witch becomings.

Some witches within the data sample preferred to showcase their witch selves more on one site to another. This was because the platform may have been useful in facilitating their purpose for being online. For example, the site may be a place to sell merchandise that they have created; a space where they can present their own praxis via stylised images or a v-log that teaches others about their interpretation of The Craft. To illustrate this point, whilst exploring Netnography, there seemed to be more individualised profiles on Instagram and YouTube rather than Facebook or Pinterest.

The Instagram and YouTube posts included videos and images that were of a personal nature and seemed to offer a candid review of the person's life and attitude to witches and Witchcraft. Whereas sites such as Facebook or Twitter were less promotional and seemed to offer a broader multiphrenic spectrum of identities (one

of which was Witch) and rather than self-promoting witch selves, it was a place to collate thoughts about Witch and a space to reflect and share praxis. Having a preference to a social media space was also noted by some of the witches in the Life History Narrative interviews.

Within the data sample from the spaces such as Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube, Witch was performed through displays of ritual, altars, grimoires,[81] clothing, the sale of Witch merchandise and the sharing of images that contained Witch signifiers such as a cauldron, witches' hat or broom. Yet it was the phatic communication (Hartley, 2003) within the comment boxes such as 'well done'; 'I agree' or 'I feel the same' that reinforced the sense of witch self and developed Witch becomings. This was because the responses to posts noted how the images and sharing of narratives inspired the observers of the original posts and seemed to reinforce what Witch meant to them personally.

Moreover, the comments attached to the original post also demonstrated how the online community reinforced Witch identities and collectively agreed what Witch was and was not. The comments affirmed the main message of the original post and subsequent linked posts responded with either corrections about Witchcraft or included general agreement and sharing of personal accounts that were similar to the original post. The online community crafted Witch and developed memes where Witch could be an empowered female, historical scapegoat, a liberal attitude to sexualities, a goddess, or someone with an alternative lifestyle to the 'norm' such as goth or vampire. The self-identified witch therefore merged many of these identities,

[81] A book that contains spells. See glossary of terms for definition

and each one was an aspect of their self-crafted witch, which was then shared within Instagram, YouTube or within personal blogs. Fernbeck claims that today people have "faith in a technology based spiritualism" (2002: 256) and this is evident within social media.

Facebook's interface encouraged the sharing of personal Witch narratives but unlike Instagram and YouTube, the narratives tended to happen within designated groups rather than the person's personal profile. To clarify, YouTube and Instagram presented personal narratives within video for example The Itty Bitty Celtic Witch (2019) and Yates-Garcia (2019) whereas Facebook groups included collective narratives occasionally with video but usually the posts were text based. Within the shared spaces of Facebook, the performance of Witch seemed less flamboyant, candid and more understated than the personal narratives of Instagram and YouTube witches.

Nevertheless, the phatic communication in all platforms still included responses that offered comfort, confirmed the sentiment within the post, presented inspirational affirmations or gave general advice. Rarely was there a discussion that engaged in meaningful dialogue of what it meant to be a witch unless the post requested specifics about Witch life narratives from the online group i.e. there was a group request to share images of altars or ritual. The communication made the witch who posted the message within the group feel supported and valued and at times this was acknowledged in the chat that occurred below the post.

The online place therefore became a space of safety where individuals could share personal accounts that affected their sense of witch self with like-minded and sympathetic groups. The space encouraged a virtuous cycle of positive attitudes to various performances and presentations of witch selves hence, enabled personalised Witch becomings. Although at times there were negative comments, these were few possibly because they were made within closed Facebook groups that needed permission from administrators to become part of it. The publicly-private space therefore restricted any potential 'trolls' and 'griefing' (Boellstorff, 2010: 80) before joining. Also, administrators or other members of the group would close the conversation down with a counter argument that rectified an issue.

Collective management of identities is common when performing identities because the community tend to police the type of identities that are formed and if the boundaries are broken or crossed then the performed identity is noted as being incorrect. Hence some online pagan groups created restrictions to Witch becomings through the repetition of community-accepted identities and behaviours. For example, some Wiccans stated that it was only possible to become a Wiccan witch if a person was taught the Craft by a High priestess and within an established coven for at least a year and a day. More, anyone who had not undergone such training could harm themselves or others because they did not understand the potential danger of magic (Cowan, 2005).

Social networking spaces disrupt Witch becomings and Witch identities because the infrastructure of the platforms encourage a freedom of expression and fluid knowledge exchange. Thus, anyone can claim the term Wiccan and Witch and

practice any form of Witchcraft even if they had not attended a coven or had met a High Priestess. Self-claimed witches therefore used the social networking platforms to create new Witch identities and thereby challenged some of the established hegemonic views within some branches of Paganism. In addition, the growth of followers on their account established them as an influencer and accordingly considered by the online community to be an expert. Consequently, the person developed into a Mycelium-witch that offered a hybridised form of Witch identity that may have some similarities to established pagan groups such as Wicca but would still be distinct from them.

Accordingly, Mycelium witches offer alternative examples of what it means to be-Witch and showcase the unlimited potential of Witch identities. Witch can be anything a person chooses, rather than a set ideal or stereotype. Furthermore, the Witch identity can be co-constructed within the mediated online world through networked connections and rhizomatic behaviours. Harmony Nice (2019) who has been discussed in chapters five and six, is a Mycelium-witch. She has developed her spirituality and personalised Wiccan witch praxis through the online social media platforms of Instagram, YouTube and a personal website www.harmonynice.co.uk. The video on her YouTube channel (posted on May 8th, 2019) explains her journey so far into spirituality and Wicca and how her spirituality is constantly in a state of flux. Harmony Nice is a useful example that illustrates how a person becomes Witch and how a witch identity develops through the interactions within social networking spaces. It also exemplifies a celebrity-witch that forms as a direct result of the social networking platforms and the interactions within them. Her videos (Nice, 2019) show how she acknowledges that she has come to be considered a Witch icon and

influencer hence typifies the mycelium within the Rhizome-Mycelium theoretical framework. In sum therefore, it is the infrastructure of social networking places (plateau) and the networking of the people who explore rhizomatic themes within the social spaces that enable the creation of personalised Witch becomings.

Furthermore, social networking spaces not only enable the reframing and reconstruction of Witch identities through the merging of Witch memes, it also offers examples of contemporary fourth wave feminism because they break down the hegemonic view of what it means to be a witch and to be Woman. Witch permits fluid identities and ways of being. Cyber-witches offer opportunity to examine the intersectionality of power relationships. The 21st century witch[82] that is depicted in popular culture and within social media present "strong challenge to the conservative norms… [and] refuses the domestication of the witch as a comfortable second or third wave feminist icon" (Gibson, 2018: 159, 160).

The dataset for this thesis therefore depicted posts from witches that included aspects of Rottenberg's (2018) neoliberal feminism that was based on the sensibilities of women being accountable for their own self-care and wellbeing. The representations explored spells that offered self-help, healing herbs, solutions to difficult issues and requests for group meditation (Rottenberg, 2018; Banet-Weiner, Gill and Rottenberg, 2019). The social platforms also provided examples of popular feminism because the

[82] Gibson (2018: 150, 151) explores the feminist witch and uses examples from the *American Horror Story* series Coven. She notes that "gender equality has demonstrably not been achieved" and argues that issues such as gender, transgender, disability, race and religion are merging. She suggests they are politicised. Fourth wave feminism is "more accepting of individual choices of lifestyle, appearance and level than mid-century feminism." Gibson's ideas are relevant to my study because the Mycelium-Witch exemplifies the fluid nature of identities and personal choice that is a norm in Paganism.

infrastructure encouraged a wide reach to the public "from organising marches to hashtag activism to commodities" (Banet-Weiner et al, 2019: 7). Furthermore, within the social networking places witches created spaces that raised discussion topics related to female (dis) empowerment and challenged the hetero-normativities of Witch identity. The social places provided the opportunity to actively live out popular feminism. Although people performed Witch online, the performance was not the same as in the theatre, film or television, more it was an example of identity play (Salih, 2002; Butler, 1988) rather than a played representation of Witch identity (LaMothe, 2005).[83] During their becomings, play enabled the Life History Narrative and cyber-witches to try on various roles to find the best match and discover their authentic self.

Online representations of Witch vary, but from the dataset it was clear that Witch was not gender specific and was not of a particular race and culture. However, most of the images within this thesis reflect the white, Western demographic of the Life History Narrative witches partially because of my computer's search algorithms that seemed to offer an unconscious bias and partially because I intended to use online data that matched that of the Life History Narrative interviews.

It is important to note that popular feminism and Witchcraft is different to Ezzy' s notion of popularist witchcraft (2003), because the witches are not choosing the hetero-normative identities of Witch. More, popular feminist witches voice ideas and opinions, create interactive media such as video and chat, challenge stereotype (Banet-Weiner, 2019:10) and effectively mediatise the feminist Witch and

[83] See chapter six for discussion about identity play and performativity

Witchcraft. That is not to say that some cyber witches were not attracted towards popularist witchcraft, but this would more likely be an example of third-wave feminism rather than fourth because the popularist witch is not challenging hetero-normativity and intersectionality (Gibson, 2018: 150 -151).

Digital spaces encouraged popular feminism because they made the hidden witch visible. The witch became more visible the more memes and images that were shared and networked within and through various social networking platforms. It seems that the structures of social media encouraged witches to become more visible online. Witch becomings therefore were created through the rhizomatic connections within the spaces and subsequently the double click decisions that happened (Latour, 1999). However, it is worth being mindful of the potential of a "glossy diversity" in such visibility (Banet-Weiner, 2019: 12) and consider that, although presenting a Witch identity, it is difficult to understand the extent the presentation of the witch was authentically a feminist identity.

This being the case, it is difficult to confidently assert that an online witch identity is a performance that plays with a witch identity to become a mediated form of Witch. It is difficult whether individuals are play-acting and not being authentic. Consequently, further research in this area is needed.

As indicated previously, social networking spaces such as Instagram and Facebook are places to network but are also inhabited differently by the witch community. For example, Instagram encourages mediated image sharing, Twitter micro blogging, Facebook group discussions, YouTube video creation and Pinterest scrap booking.

The purpose of social media in this study therefore demonstrated that they were places for witches to digitally connect and follow each other's stories, but the ability to connect did not create becomings. The social places became plateaus that facilitated Witch becomings through sharing personal accounts of Witch and engaging with phatic communication and utterances (Brooks, 2013; Hartley, 2003) But becoming Witch happened through individuals reflecting on the responses that were made by themselves and others to the online statements that were presented about belief, praxis, ritual, knowledge and heritage. The social networking digital places offered cerebral spaces where individuals could conceptualise and express non-normative identities that may have been misunderstood, stereotyped or ostracised offline.

7.2.1 The Process of Becoming Witch within Social Networking Spaces

The infrastructure of a social networking space enabled the individual to follow themes of interest and engage in experiences within the online space and the pathways facilitated the witch becomings. The online spaces were important for the Life History Narrative witches because they often found it difficult to locate other witches offline due to physical distance. Jenny, Tanya and David had to travel over two hours to attend a moot and this became problematic if they did not have transport or had responsibilities such as family and work. Hence the social opportunities within the Internet, was a source of support for many of them but specifically Penny who had mobility issues. The open and fluid network of digital platforms therefore supported their becoming Witch and the online spaces became an important part in expressing their witch identity. The spaces were a priori to the creation of their witch identity because witch selves were fashioned into existence through the active use of

the various networks and infrastructures such as hyperlinks, video creation software and chat within the media platform. The online infrastructures assisted like-minded people to congregate and learn about Witch identities.

The process of becoming Witch within social networking spaces seemed for many of the Life History Narrative witches, to initially happen in a linear way but then as they followed the rhizomatic connections that sparked their interest, the process would become more chaotic and complex. For example, a person who decided to explore Witch or Witchcraft, may have started by visiting a social media site and looked to research aspects of The Craft that related to altars, the occult or spell casting. This may be a generic Google search at first but then they may have extended this search and looked for witches within social media, possibly lurking to see what they were saying and reflecting on whether they agreed and whether it resonated with them in some way. They may have decided to join a Facebook group that they felt related to one of their Witch identities. Thus, they gained ideas that they assimilated into their own practise. Simultaneously, they may have followed a group or individual on a different social site such as Twitter and so inhabited more than one social networking space at a time. After a while the person may have decided to create their own group, page, blog or video but this would only happen if they had confidence in using the media and if they had a personality type that was confident in sharing personal knowledge with strangers. It is important to remember that none of the Witch becomings where the same, however similarities could be drawn from their stories.

What can be concluded from all 13 narratives however, is that the exploration of a variety of media helped to develop a sense of community and instilled a confidence that would then embolden the individual to explore further identities that may have challenged their own pre-conceived realities of what a witch was. It is crucial to note therefore that becoming is a gradual process and never has an end point. Hence because the becomings of witches are continuous, iterative and exponential, a person comes to realise they are a witch rather attach themselves to the label of Witch and follow a particular path. Therefore, it is impossible to trace and actualise how to become a witch. A person is a witch when they, over time, decide to use that term, but their confidence in the witch identity occurs through the becoming process. Thus, unlike becoming a Christian or Jew, a witch's pathways to becoming a witch are rhizomatic and endless. The Witch identity is constantly in flux.

Generalisations about the pathways that support Witch becomings can be made however from the common trends and behaviours of the Life History Narrative witches. All 13 witches liked to explore sites that they were familiar with such as Facebook and used them for non-witch networking. All 13 witches felt more confident to expand their networking and be more attentive in their choice of sites and mindful of the content presented after they had acknowledged themselves as a witch. They then searched the Internet to glean information, learn from others and hone their Witchcraft. Each witch's becomings was different however there were similarities between the rhizomatic behaviours.

Figure 3 represents the complex nature of becomings within social networking spaces and has been created from the data within the Life History Narrative

interviews. The diagram demonstrates how a witch's authentic self is actualised once they have explored a variety of social media platforms and then used them as plateaus to engage in networking experiences (such as online chat) that develop into personalised ontologies and epistemologies of Witchcraft. This actualisation however happens exponentially with each new visit to the space hence, the witch self is reaffirmed and re-actualised on each new cycle. This means a witch will enter a plateau such as Facebook on multiple occasions with different intentions each time and each new entry supports the development of Witch becomings. This is because the interactions are never the same with each new visit hence each time, the witch engages in something different thus adds to their bricolage of self.

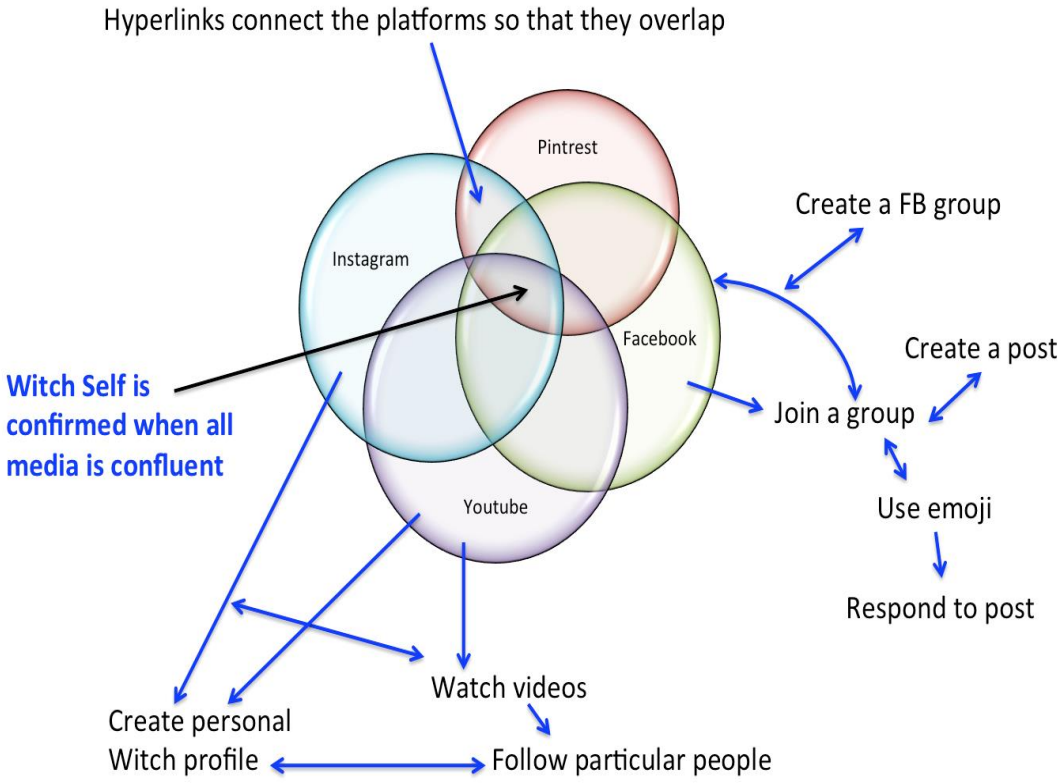


Figure 3: Diagram representing the complex nature of becoming Witch within social networking spaces (image 5)

The diagram displays a small selection of social media platforms to illustrate how an individual may explore spaces during their journey into becoming Witch. It is very likely however that a person will visit more than three social networking spaces.

Becomings occurred when people used embedded hyperlinks, posts, chat, video, likes and shared posts in social media platforms to connect ideas. They then reflected on the posts and assimilated into their own personalised schema of Witch. The witch self was fully actualised when the multiple experiences within the media spaces merged. This was when a person was likely to start identifying as a witch. This emergence is demonstrated in the centre of the diagram. Witch self is confirmed when all media is confluent.

It is important to remember however that the diagram is a snapshot of an actualisation and part of the rhizomatic journey of Witch becomings. Becomings are not static and so this diagram represents the middle of the journey to becoming Witch and thus is also rhizomatic in nature. This diagram will be cyclical and so a person's self-actualisation of the type of witch they considered themselves to be would develop and change after engaging with more online (and very likely offline) experiences. Hence the witch will engage in even more reflections about the experiences and what they mean to their witch-self. Consequently, they frequently adapt their witch stasis. The witch-self is exponential and aims to achieve the ideal witch-self.

Identities on social media are a representation of the ideal self and may not

necessarily be a representation of reality (Cowan, 2005; Winder, 2008; Bunt 2009), yet there was an acknowledgement within the online Witch community that online social spaces enabled people to be true to their inner nature. Often self-identified witches felt that whilst online they were able to present their authentic self and publicly self-identify as a witch. This could be because of the operant conditioning that was apparent within the online community of practice.

The dataset for this thesis demonstrated that those who engaged with social media and shared their beliefs within an online group often gained phatic feedback through comments and emojis (such as the thumbs up or smiley face) that were offered within the site's infrastructure. The positive reinforcements confirmed Witch selves through operant conditioning hence self-identified witches felt they were in a safe space and consequently were open and honest about their beliefs and praxis. They did not feel they needed to hide what they considered to be their authentic selves. Some felt they were more authentic online then offline. The reservation to openly identify as Witch offline was believed to be due to lack of awareness and acceptance of witches by the general population and the stereotype that is still attached to the witch persona.

Images and videos may not necessarily always be accurate accounts of specific events because they may have been altered with picture imaging software. Nevertheless, the posts that used Witch signifiers such as a broom, cauldron or cat were a performance of Witch identities (Butler, 1988) and individuals needed to play with such identities to form their witch self. Moreover, because the optional buttons promoted likes and dislikes the infrastructure of the online place encouraged performances of Witch because of the anticipated potential responses from the online

community. Hence the online interaction supported a personalised witch identity and the acknowledgement of authentic selves.

Indeed, some witches were so adept at creating a Witch persona that they had thousands of followers and became influential within the online community, gaining a form of celebrity status. Zappaviga, (2014) argues that celebrity happens when the audience feels a sense of authenticity and this is due to the vulnerability that is apparent in the sharing of personal life narratives. Real-time posts and video that are shared on social media, such as that in YouTube, offer a glimpse into someone's life that is not always edited. Hence those who are exploring their Witch identity can become emboldened to self-identity as a witch because of the honest exchange and openness shared by self-proclaimed witches. Again, this is a performativity of Witch, but it also creates the existence of a witch's identity (Stern, 2003) through repeated behaviours, positive reinforcement and the repeated use of Witch signifiers (Epp and Price, 2008).

The autonomous structures of social media have been created to allow individuals to connect with whoever they wish. Social media has been designed for people to share and respond in multiple ways and its structure is chaotic thus the connections difficult to trace. It is clear therefore why Bluemink (2015) and Landow (2006) claim the structure of the Internet to be a rhizome and Hostaker (2017) to suggest it is a display of rhizomatic connections. Yet my thesis indicates that, for Witch becomings, the Internet and Social media platforms are less rhizomatic and more related to actor networking because it is possible to recreate and template the infrastructures of the platforms. The rhizome is the person who uses the space not the space itself.

To illustrate, an individual (actor) will display their online persona within a social media profile such as that of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Pinterest. It is the first level of their public identity and is a generalisation of the self. Within the platform the person creates a Pinterest board or belongs to a Facebook group that represent their interests in Witch and Witchcraft. This is the next level of identity creation. It adds to the first level and demonstrates a more nuanced understanding of who that person is. At this point, the online platform displays who a person is but also what they may believe in. It is the content of the self-made boards and the interactions within groups that enable a person to enact and endorse their witch selves.

The behaviour and choice of interactions are rhizomatic, but the platform is networked into a set structure that is complex and striated thus is tree-like. Consequently, the infrastructure of the social places, permit individuals to craft Witch identities, and the rhizomatic journey through the digital social spaces empower Witch personas. Hence the structure and behaviour both create Witch and support the becomings of the self.

Although social networking spaces are always changing they are also tree-like. They support becomings because they offer themes within the networked branches that entice individuals to nomadically explore ideas. Furthermore, social networking platforms display Witch becomings. Therefore, the social networks are plateaus that offer space to reflect on an assemblage of choices about Witch. Thus, it is the choice of themes and click decisions that a person makes that is the rhizome and not the platform. Moreover, it is the navigation through the choices that is the rhizome and social media is the tree.

The conceptual space of social media however has altered as a result of the rhizomatic behaviour and the place/platform/territory (Deleuze and Guattari, (2013) has been de-territorialised by the witches. Witch communities have deconstructed the social media territories (places) and how they are used. They now use the places as meeting spaces. They are places where people can be who they wish to be and present Witch as having a liquid identity. The online places are now conceptual spaces that enable the reconstruction and reframing of Witch identities and self-identified witches have re-territorialised the platforms. This is so they can use them to offer safe social spaces that explore sacred ritual, praxis, commercial enterprise, education and learning, thus crafting and re-crafting Witch. The purpose of social media for witches is not only to meet and network but also to fashion Witch into being, and to re-imagine Witch so people can claim personal Witch identities.

To summarise this section therefore, social networking spaces enable Witch becomings through the phatic feedback within comment boxes and through the infrastructures such as emojis that are attached to online posts. The positive (and on occasion negative) reinforcement within the feedback emboldens witches to continue to engage in conversations about Witch and share personal accounts of their beliefs, praxis and becomings. Furthermore, reflecting on such comments enable individuals to assimilate, adapt and accommodate thinking about concepts of Witch and thus create a personalised Witch schema. It is therefore, the structures of the social networking places that empower witches to control the spaces where becomings can happen and these places and spaces enable the creation of Witch. More specifically however, exploring and simultaneously interacting within more than one social space

whilst reflecting on what others say, is how an individual will craft their witch self. Consequently, they feel they are being more authentic to their true nature and more open about their spirituality. Hence, claim and present a witch identity to the online community.

The next section and aim three of this chapter explore the concept of authenticity in more detail and how the social networking spaces confirm Witch.

7.3 Aim Three: To understand how social networking spaces are used to create their personal realities of the self

The final aim of this research thesis was to gain an understanding of how people used social networking spaces to confirm their own realities of the self. As has been discussed, identity theories note that individuals constantly engage with identity play and try out roles before promoting one over another, somewhat like dressing up (Fachin and Davel, 2015; Salih, 2005) so that they are able to confirm their authentic self (Cable, Gino and Staats, 2013). Playing online with Witch discourses such as dress, utterances, objects and ritual are essential for Witch becomings.

The online platforms are environments that culture identity formation through sharing various Witch signifiers and ways of being. Indeed, the data in this thesis indicates that social networking spaces enable people to form identities through creating posts that present who they wished to be, rather than who they are, hence the witches write their true selves into being over time. The online self-constructed narrative of a witch eventually became the offline and accepted reality of the

individual. This is because the individual used the online space as a plateau for identity creation through play, and identity confirmation through engaging in phatic communication and operant conditioning. Online posts presented who a person wished to be, and users confirmed that identity to be an accepted truth of Witch. The constructed identity therefore was confirmed and established by the online Witch community. Furthermore, as noted in the previous section, the online platforms actively encouraged the sharing of and co-construction of ideas. The way self-proclaimed witches created and confirmed Witch identity varied but they mainly explored online social spaces to reinforce the witch they felt they were and, challenged stereotypes of what they were not. The next section explores the witch stereotype further.

7.3.1 Witch Identities

As has already been explored in chapters three, four and six the stereotypes of witches in popular culture such as film, fiction, media and within the search algorithms in search engines suggest a witch is often depicted as a female who is evil, old, ugly and untrustworthy as is demonstrated in screenshot image 11 of a Google search for ‘witch’. This is identified as the hag-witch and she is presented as someone who should be feared. This witch stereotype is reinforced in general Western cultural practices with Hallowe’en alongside images of witches in films, books and cartoons. As has already been discussed previously in this thesis, the hegemonic discourse of the hag-witch bolsters misunderstandings of witch identities that in turn can cause prejudice against a group who celebrate Witchcraft and occult practices.

Furthermore, prejudicial ageism of post-menopausal women (Palmore, 2001) is presented in images of Witch within social networking spaces. The hag-witch is othered within society because of the fear she creates due to her being innately evil and disrupts the patriarchal and established status quo. Rountree (1997) argues that forthright speech and action may be viewed as a threat to patriarchy therefore society has had to create the female stereotype of the wicked witch, selfless godmother or demented hag to diminish female power and agency. Yet this prejudice against ageism is being subtly challenged within activist feminism, feminist witchcraft and fourth wave feminism. Women are sharing images of the crone and hag and reclaiming the term to combat patriarchy. Challenging such stereotypes has given rise to feminist witchcraft and self-identified witches have used the social platforms to challenge and rescue the hag so that she has agency and worth.[84]

Images posted on Pinterest, Instagram and Twitter present the hag-witch as empowered and wise. Shared images and posts offer the older women as knowledgeable and powerful as is exemplified in chapter four images 54 and 56. The memes that go with such images suggest that the older woman should be feared but not because she is a witch, hag or crone but because she is a woman as is represented in chapter seven image 6. The meme denotes that it is the wisdom of Woman that should be feared rather than the signifiers of Witch. Such posts are active challenges to patriarchal tropes that are intended to curb female empowerment and agency. However, Witch signifiers are used within images within social networking posts as a way to reinforce the agency of Woman because of the suggested authority and power that they carry as is represented in image 6.

[84] See chapter five for a more detailed discussion and evidence from the dataset

Furthermore, there is a heuristic that suggests post-menopausal women "lack creativity […] are unproductive […] ill, frail, dependent, asexual and lonely" (Swift, Abram, Lamont and Drury, 2017: 200) thus Western society sees ageing women as incompetent and benign. This benevolent ageism (Palmore, 2001) suggests that the female witch should be pitied because her Witchcraft is impotent, and she is unable to competently conduct Witchcraft. Compared to a man, she is less capable, and her worth is diminished. Now that she can no longer procreate, she is insignificant to society and even more, has no purpose for the youth of today (Henneberg, 2010). However, again, witches have presented the hag-witch within social networking spaces as being beneficial to younger generations (as is suggested in the frequently shared post of a hag bestowing a young witch with a pointed hat in chapter seven image 7) because of her inherent wisdom. Therefore, witches are using social media to address stereotype and prejudice and make it a space for the celebration of Woman and in particular, value the post-menopausal woman and older witch.

White argues that "to truly liberate ourselves from these patriarchal ideologies we need an alternative image to reflect on" (2019: 7) and so within social networking spaces, witches have presented and played with images of the Triple goddess focusing on the equal agency of the Maiden, Mother and Crone to provide a Witch identity that is more in tune with 21st century sensibilities of the empowered woman.

Alternative Witch identities to the hag-witch are created and shared and aim to challenge patriarchal ideologies of how women should be, and they include non-normative gender and anti-ageist Witch stereotypes i.e. the witch is presented as

male, queer, old, young, voluptuous. Witches within platforms such as Pinterest, Instagram and in closed Facebook groups engage with playful discourses around the empowered and sexually liberated young and older women (Pearson, 2005: 40) and such images redefine the hag-witch and offer alternative Witch identities. This witch identity is presented as sexually confident, young and empowered.

This sexualised-witch identity gives permission for female and male witches to play with their sexual identities and have the confidence to enjoy the attention that their sexual power evokes in them and in others. In contrast to the hag-witch who is asexual and lacks creativity, this younger identity is empowered, sexually inquisitive and in control. Sexualised-witch identities within social networking spaces seem to challenge societal norms that are still prevalent in popular culture such as films and fiction, and which suggest a witch is incomplete unless in a heterosexual relationship (Gibson, 2018; Pearson, 2005; Ezzy, 2003b). Witches share a wider selection of representations of Witch within social networking spaces that include male, female, young and old, thus challenge the ageist stereotype threat of hag-witch and patriarchal tropes of Woman and Witch. The Pinterest images 8, 9 and 10 are examples that have been shared and re-shared throughout media such as Facebook and Instagram. The comments and memes within these examples suggest the identity of Witch is one who is empowered, sexually aware and confident.

Ezzy (2003a) argues that people are more inclined to connect with the positive rather than the negative images of witches. Witch identities that present a witch as sexy, popular, confident and successful therefore tend to attract popularist witchcraft (Coco and Woodward, 2007) who are attracted to the aesthetic of Witch rather than

the practice of Witchcraft. Individuals appreciate the consumerist elements of Witch identities and may comment on how a post looks rather than how to engage in ritual or learning about Witchcraft. As is evidenced in the comments below Wiccan witch Harmony Nice's YouTube podcast (images 12 and 13). Therefore, potentially a person's sense of witch-self may be temporary and a stage of spiritual development rather than a demonstration of their authentic self.

I use the term fad-witch to categorize this Witch identity because some individuals use Witch signifiers, write posts and include images of what they have collected and created for example an altar or a Grimoire, rather than what they do and believe in. Fad-witch therefore, will be attracted to and share images and posts that are related to TV series, films or books rather than a belief system. This is not to say that a fad-witch is not a legitimate witch identity, yet Tanya in the Life History Narrative interview did question whether fad-witches are authentic and whether their praxis will have longevity.

Hag-witches, sexualised-witches and fad-witches are examples of a liquid modernity because playful witch identities are fluid in nature (Bauman, 2007). They cannot rely on a static identity because identities are expected to change due to social influences and are co-constructed through experiences (Fachin and Davel, 2015). A witch will create an identity that at one time is hag-witch, and at another is a sexualised or fad-witch and at other times they will be both or all three typologies, which is an example of multiphrenic self (Gergen, 1997: 76). All experiences and identities will help confirm which Witch they feel they are becoming and within the rhizome they will be in constant flux to discover who they are as Witch.

Having explored three typologies of Witch identities, it is worth discussing how becoming a hag, sexualised or fad witch, required the playful deconstruction of who they thought they were so to become who they wanted to be. Greenough (2018) amongst others, argue that to create an identity a person needs to actively analyse and undo the previous one. Therefore, identity formation is a process that relates to de-territorialization and re-territorialization (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013). The witch identities are associated with the person rather than the space. Through posting anti-Christian posts or discussing their early explorations of faith and religion for example the witch exemplified how they were deconstructing their previous religious identity in order to reconstruct who they wanted to be. By identifying with what they were not, they confirmed what they were. They were often unbecoming something to become Witch and they did this through sharing and posting of images, texts, blogs and videos within social networking spaces and effectively posting, liking and sharing the witch-self into existence (Stern 2003; Greenough, 2018).

7.3.2 Confirming Witch Identities

So far, the discussion has focused on the creation of Witch becomings and considered how the rhizomatic connections within social networking spaces, are also an opportunity to confirm witch identity. This is because a self-identified witch will seek online like-minded individuals to gain confirmation of what they are and what they are not. For example, a witch may identify with the goddess Hecate[85] and the crone. Consequently, they join Facebook groups and follow Instagramers that display

[85] Hecate is often the goddess chosen by older witches

an identity and attitude to Witchcraft that is similar to their own. The individual may then post a message asking for confirmation of their belief-system because they feel that they would receive approval of what they know to be true, giving them confidence to continue with their praxis.

The online community tended to respond with posts that affirmed the ontology of a witch thus confirmed a sense of personalised witch-identity for the individual. Likewise, corroboration also happened for what they were not. An individual may post something that notes what a witch is not, and the community would endorse the post with a like, share or comment. The more replies an individual received that confirmed what they were not i.e. I am not Christian, and affirmed what they believed they were i.e. I am a crone, the larger likelihood there was for the individual to present their authentic self and become Witch. These phatic communications enabled the witch to have confidence and present their authentic witch-self.

This thesis has identified that in the main, individuals confirmed Witch when they were exploring aspects of the occult.[86] To the pagan community occult is not a negative concept, more it represents the unseen or hidden elements of life. Therefore, individuals posted about the occult (image 14) and the community replied with agreement through likes and added further information or shared similar stories of interest. Thus, confirming that the occult was part of the witch's Craft and an accepted ontology of Witch. In addition, belief-concepts such as Witchcraft as innate and the threefold karmic philosophy were shared throughout various social networking platforms. The repetitive sharing of such ideas developed into a

[86] See chapter four for discussion related to this area

hegemonic idea that confirmed some of the foundational principles of Witch and Witchcraft. Consequently, although there is no dogma and no one way to be-Witch, the sharing of posts and repeated ideals validated a set of nomadic principles that were shared amongst the community and grew into a hegemonic discourse around the concept of Witch and praxis.

To conclude this section of the thesis, social networking spaces confirmed the personal becomings of witch-self by connecting with like-minded individuals and sharing repeated posts that became embedded in the collective psyche of what a witch was. Yet some individuals also used the spaces to combat Witch stereotypes that have been formed from misogynistic attitudes towards women. In such cases, witches reclaimed the negative Witch stereotype to challenge patriarchal tropes. Moreover, the repeated online sharing confirmed what Witch was not. For that reason, the social networking spaces offered opportunity to de-territorialize the notion of Witch so to re-territorialize Witch identities. This is significant because deterritorialization enables awareness of the myth attached to the notion that Witch lore and knowledge of The Craft must be passed through the female line. Hence the practice of sharing knowledge about The Craft via social networking spaces established a new liquid-modern method of becoming Witch.

7.4 General Considerations

This study set out to determine what influences Witch becomings and how social networking spaces facilitates them. The research focused on understanding how individuals used online connections to support becomings and explored how social networking spaces were used as enablers for becomings. The thesis has analysed the

ways individuals create and confirm Witch identities. This section of chapter seven is structured with four over-arching themes that have been raised in the research. The themes are used to summarise the findings of the overall study and are;

1. Polyphonic bricolage and the multiphrenic self
2. Social networking spaces as plateaus for becomings
3. Challenging and playing with Witch stereotypes
4. Rhizome-Mycelium Theory

They help to summarise the three research aims into a conclusion about how witches create and confirm personalised faith identities. Each theme is explored in turn and ends with a final summary about the possible implications of my study.

7.4.1 Polyphonic Bricolage and Multiphrenic Self

Witches build personalised faith identities within social networking spaces, confirming praxis and belief by creating a montage of who they feel they are. The posting of personal ideas about Witchcraft, the occult, Witch stereotypes, Woman, Goddess, ritual etc. are liked, shared and re-shared within the online platforms and amalgamated into a montage of Witch identities. What is more, they present a personalised tapestry of Witch identity and faith. The tapestry becomes a tableau of Witch that is socially constructed and influenced by others, thus providing a Witch self that is non-static and often in flux (Filiciak, 2003: 97). Witch therefore is portrayed as having a multi-facetted identity.

Visual and written discourses that are within social networking spaces are blended and, as is with polyphonic bricolage (Schmidt, 2003: 10), demonstrate that there is no one fixed Witch identity - only a collection of ideas and voices that offer

alternative ways of being. Witch becomings therefore present an emerging desire to be a particular type of witch (Harvey, 2013: X). That desire will continually change however because the desire will often alter with external influences. Hence a witch will not be-Witch for long but will always be becoming Witch.

Witch formations are constructed through the assembly of multiple roles and values hence Witch does not have a monolithic identity (Brunsma, Delgado and Rockquemore, 2012). Through polyphonic bricolage where a range of ideas, discourses and experiences help to form an identity, individuals create a multiphrenic witch (Gergen, 1991: 76) that presents their authentic self to the online world (Cable, Gino and Staats, 2013). Therefore, Witch is confirmed through multiple interactions and then used by the individual to create who they feel they are and want to be to various online groups. Their becomings are fluid. The rhizomatic interactions within social networking spaces therefore enable the fruition of complex personalised Witch identities.

7.4.2 Social Networking Spaces as Plateaus for Becoming Witch

Each Social media is a plateau for Witch becomings because they house issues and ideas related to Witch in easily accessible spaces such as chat rooms, instant messaging, video, comment boxes, images. They offer space where individuals can openly share and challenge information, which in turn encourages reflection that affects personal epistemologies. The complex structure of a network and new technologies encourage like-minded groups to connect. The interface has enabled people to establish safe spaces for knowledge sharing about Witch.

Online Witch becomings therefore are explored through arriving at a plateau such as a Facebook group and then moving onto a different social networking page and possibly posting about a personal belief. The becomings happen through a person assimilating with the online space, then accommodating anything of interest with their current ideas and finally adapting into a new schema of Witch. The online interactions and experiences, co-construct new personal understandings of Witch. Such interactions are part of the becomings of Witch because, they add to the bricolage of the self.

Although Twitter, Instagram and Facebook for example, are structured environments that encourage interaction, they are also dynamic and unfixed social spaces. They offer clear pathways to hyperlinks that move individuals into other spaces that contain similar ideas but additionally the spaces themselves are frequently changing due to the modifications and additions that the users make to the platforms. Hence it is not only the witch who is becoming but the online social networking space is too. The seemingly arboreal, rigid structure of the social media becomes complex rather than linear and it is this complex structure of hyperlinks and connections that is the enabler for nomadic thought and the assemblage of ideas about Witch within the rhizomatic exploration of Witch identities.

Yet social media is not entirely rhizomatic. Social networking spaces have a tree like structure with the ability to create groups, images and video that can be made into a template and copied. Latour's (2011) Actor Network Theory therefore is a useful tool that helps untangle the inter-connectivity within such spaces because, unlike the rhizome, it can track the connections between actors and re-create the networks that

are formed. Embedded hashtags and hyperlinks within a post, reveal similarities between the actor networks and offer some indication towards the perceptions of Witch. Exploring social networking spaces and places has provided some insight into "structures of the social" (Latour, 1999: 18) and shown that there are common understandings of Witch. The actor networks indicate that Witch is

- A gender-neutral term
- Someone who has self-efficacy in Witchcraft
- Anyone who uses occult tools and/or energies
- A feeling of agency through gaining empowerment after identifying as a witch
- An attitude that celebrates age, Woman, the crone or/and hag
- A state of mind that acknowledges the human condition and sees positive and negative events as a natural process of life and the becomings of Witch
- Individualistic. The interpretations of Witch may be similar but not identical
- Innate and instinctive in everyone and awakened when someone who chooses to acknowledge this and become Witch

Social media therefore is tree-like and can offer common threads that lead to a general awareness of Witch, but its structure also provides opportunity to create personalised understandings through the spaces that witches inhabit. The social media platforms are plateaus for common thought but then the lines of flight off them are personally directed by the user hence are rhizomatic. Thus, there are multiple possibilities of Witch and ways of becoming Witch within the community's general awareness of what a witch is.

7.4.3 Challenging and Playing with Witch stereotypes

Moving on from a common and general understanding of Witch, becomings are also created through collective understandings of what Witch is not. The posts that were collected for the dataset of this thesis showed that they were a form of fourth wave feminism because they addressed the intersectionality of Witch and the stereotypes of witches and Witchcraft. Often individuals or groups noted a stereotype such as a witch being evil and worshiping the devil then actively challenged the discourse via online posts, noting this viewpoint as speculative and founded in misogynistic ideas about women.

The dataset included the wicked image of the female witch and used it to counter the witch stereotype, re-imagining her as less victim-like but more empowered. The newly formed rhetoric was that a witch should be feared more because of her potential power to reclaim her agency rather than the historical trope of an evil, wicked and persecuted woman. To become Witch, self-claimed witches, undid previously held judgments of Witch and played with stereotype to create the Witch they felt represented them either collectively in an online community or personally. Shared posts stressed that a witch was not dark or light, but both. They also stressed a need for the online rhetoric of non-witches to include opportunities for understanding about alternative spiritualities. Such posts suggested that it was important to acknowledge what a witch was not. Hence the posts included non-normative representations of Woman, Witch, gender and sexual orientation.

Yet the messages within the posts that intimated the reclaiming of Witch were a little contradictory. Although they were claiming that a 21st century witch challenged

misogyny and patriarchy, and they presented the witch as empowered and victorious, many images within the posts were sexualised and often depicted an anti-feminist ideal. For example, a post may present a popularised image of a witch where she was sexualised (chapter four, image 72 and 73). Occasionally, posts that represented popularist Witchcraft (Ezzy, 2003a) suggested that the female witch was only fully actualised or satisfied when she was in a heterosexual relationship (Pearson, 2010). What is more, in some cases, posts that were shared contained images that seemed to display an accepted culture of rape and violence or presented the witch as subservient to the male god. Image 15 and 16 depict the god Pan chasing and scaring a woman or forcing a naked woman into submission.

Additionally, many shared images from the dataset collected for this thesis also seemed to value Witch as young, slim and beautiful rather than old and menopausal hence they were not necessarily combatting the ageist stereotype threat. On the one hand therefore, some posts reclaimed and reused Witch stereotypes to challenge and change the stereotype threat, but on the other, some posts bolstered the stereotype of a sexually charged woman who fornicated with the devil. This dual nature of Witch can seem confusing, yet it might actually be a development in feminist thinking, because the example are third-wave and fourth-wave feminism as has been discussed previously in this chapter and other chapters of this thesis.

Nevertheless, challenging stereotype is not essential to becoming Witch. The amount of interaction with a post reflects the self-identified witch's mindset. Whether someone agrees or not with the post through liking, sharing or following is immaterial because the rhizomatic connections naturally allow a self-identified witch

to create their own personal pathways towards the witch they will become. Through reflection, the person will assimilate (or not) the message of the post into personal understanding. Hence Witch becomings are related to the personal values, mindset and experiences of the individual who is seeking a sense of spiritual identity.
This leads to the idea of an authentic self and how Witch becomings are facilitated through the rhizomatic explorations of Witch themes. An individual will explore areas of personal interest to them that concern aspects of Witch such as the heritage of Witchcraft, occult practices and ritual. The individual will follow pathways and arrive at new posts, blogs and online spaces that help develop their schema of Witch, consequently finding a fit that suits their personality, values, belief systems and cultural lifestyle.

The Life History Narrative witches acknowledged that they discovered their Witch selves through reflecting on the experiences, learning and people they interacted with. This happened over time. The sentiment was related to 'coming home' and finally being able to be 'me' and feeling authentic. Often the authentic Witch self was represented through adjectives with the title witch i.e. White witch; Green witch; Spiritual witch and online handles i.e. The Defiant Crone; The Nature Witch; The Punk Witch. Such witch identities and becomings were formed from multiplicities of self.

Having discussed that individuals explore multiple spaces to develop a sense of Witch, it is useful to acknowledge how this forms the witch-self. Similar to the analysis in the previous section, where I argued that an individual will challenge Witch stereotypes to recreate a more authentic witch, individuals play with various

identities and undo or unbecome one identity to become another (Rogers and O'Connor, 2017). Hence, they play with a variety of Witch identities as part of their becoming authentically Witch. The social networking space is used as a plateau to construct and deconstruct Witch. Often individuals played with the make-believe representation of Witch and Witchcraft thus posts included the appearance of magic through smoke and sparkles along with signifiers of a black cat, a cauldron, conical hat, a broomstick. Such posts were constructed performances rather than actualisations of Witch. However, such performance aided the becomings of Witch because individuals were continuously discarding one identity for another before adapting it as their own authentic self (Rogers and O'Connor, 2017). Likewise, the repeated performance of Witch identities established a collective awareness of what a witch was and was also policed by the online Witch community. This understanding was emphasized and monitored through actors sharing ideas within the network and including comments with posts in the social space.

7.4.4. Rhizome-Mycelium Theory

The final overall theme is in relation to the theoretical framework of this thesis. To become Witch an individual engages in networking with other people to discover various representations of Witch. Ideas are explored, and individuals use what they have encountered online to build a picture of what a witch is to them. Through following hashtags, embedded hyperlinks and conducting searches about things of interest the individual begins to knit together a network of experiences and ideas that form personalised appreciations of Witch. The pathways are related to click decisions and are therefore no longer linear, but chaotic and complex in nature and

represent the network of a rhizome. Each rhizome is unique to the individual hence they from a personalised Witch identity.

Furthermore, over time the self-identified witch becomes more confident in their praxis and begins to share this with others, often obtaining confirmation from the community. Although ideas may be different to another self-identified witch, for example they may identify with a feminist witch whereas another person may identify with a nature-based witch, both can claim the term witch. The becomings however have followed different rhizomatic pathways to get to the same identity plateau of Witch.

Once a person has decided to become a witch, they then look to develop their praxis through online exploration of ideas and information and thus gain confidence in their authentic self through phatic communication and affirmations within posts. The witch explores the various representations of ritual or spell-craft and over time, they gain confidence to share and add to existing posts. Therefore, they share their ideas within the online spaces and add to the common awareness of what a witch is.

Moving through the journey of becoming Witch the next rhizomatic pathway might be where an individual takes the decision to become more active online and post their personal philosophies within a public forum and network. Thus, an individual may set up a public Instagram account, blog or YouTube channel and share their praxis. In such instances the witch may grow in popularity and find that they themselves have become a rhizome knot for others to learn from. They may even find that they have become an example of a mycelium where they have moved away

from the more traditional ideas of Paganism and created a new form of Witch. They therefore create a hybrid-witch that is related to the common understandings of Witch but is distinct from it.

In some cases, the individual gains celebrity status and offers a new movement of new-age Witchcraft. Yet this pathway is not for everyone who self-proclaims as a witch. Many continue to create rhizomatic journeys for self-discovery of Witch rather than to create a new pagan movement. What is of import however is that the becomings are amorphous and infinite. The witch will always be in a state of becoming and will on occasion plateau with an identity. Yet future learning and experiences within the rhizome will mean that they will continually change their Witch identities and often reform to recreate a new witch self.

7.5 The Importance of this Study

I conjecture that all faith becomings follow rhizome pathways and some individuals create Rhizome-Mycelium pathways. All paths are personal and are the modes of establishing a faith identity. Becoming Witch requires individuals to follow networks and play with the online Witch characteristics offered. Self-identified witches then create a collection of multiple identities that form a tapestry or bricolage of the Witch self they wish to be. This tapestry forms into an authentic witch self and happens after a selection of seemingly random experiences from the online community that reinforce existing philosophies. These experiences help to confirm what the individual believes to be Witch lore and truth. Witch becomings are created through performing, playing with and discarding potential Witch identities. Finally, a witch

reflects on the experiences to choose the Witch that represents their personality and their authentic self.

Another consideration to becoming Witch is that there is no set view of what a witch is. Those who identify as a witch challenge the stereotype that has been reinforced through History simply by deciding to be one (Hanegraaff, 1995). By becoming Witch, they are dispelling unconscious bias and stereotype of the witch identity and the idea that Witch is myth and legend. Furthermore, on occasion the choice to become Witch is because they wish to consciously confront the patriarchal trope of woman as hag or incompetent, due to being menopausal, and the idea that Woman therefore should not be taken seriously. The choice to have a non-normative faith identity such as a witch is an activist stance against conformist attitudes of how to practice faith and belief. Hence exploring Witch within social networking spaces enables the confirmation of what Witch is not and creates a new form of Witch and Witchcraft.

The implications to having such a liquid modern attitude to faith and belief therefore could mean that Witch will always develop into new pathways of being. There may be new movements within Paganism because of technology that may change the debate about secularisation of the West. Statistically religious affiliation and attendance to places of worship in 2019/2020 may be on the decline yet this study has indicated that there still seems to be a human need to believe without belonging to organised religion. Consequently, people remotely affiliate with faith because they can mix with groups but also keep their individuality. This feeling may be further supported in future with the possibility of new social technologies. My Rhizome-

Mycelium framework may therefore be useful to analyse other faith becomings but also support the becomings of the digital human in an increasingly technical world and where people are physically communicating less offline (Turkle, 2015).

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has demonstrated how individuals become Witch through engaging with rhizomatic behaviours and addressed themes of identity in relation to how social media offer a plateau for identity play, identity construction and confirmation of self. Some issues that were raised in the Life History Narrative interviews and within the online data however have not been addressed in explicit depth within this study. This is because, although interesting and useful for shining more light into how identity is constructed, exploring additional themes may have detracted from the three research aims and taken attention away from the focus. Such themes are

- The ethnicity of a witch and whether culture impacts Witch becomings
- The gender of a witch, specifically the male and/or transgendered Witch and how they embrace the feminist movement
- The social pressures to be popular alongside the commercialisation of online-Witch and whether this devalues the faith tradition
- How sexualities of a witch and sex magic are performed online and how at times, they might suggest an anti-feminist discourse and interest in 'Kink' (Robertson, 2018).

- Finally, how some images and posts within closed Facebook groups could relate to theory that discusses rape culture in religious imagery (Exum, 2016; Edwards, 2012; Blyth, 2014)

Although not discussing such themes in detail could be considered a limitation of this study, the intention is to explore them in future academic papers. This therefore demonstrates that this study has potential to continue to add to the field and benefit future thinking about Paganisms, identity theory and social media.

Chapter Eight: Completing Witch (Final thoughts)

"To think is always to follow the witch's flight"
(Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 41)

In this final chapter, I briefly draw together some of the threads and thoughts that have been deliberated throughout this thesis. I evaluate some of the significant ideas that have been attended to but that still have scope for further study with the hope to generate future discussion within interdisciplinary fields of research.

Scholars have explored how religious identities and affiliations have been affected by popular culture (Beaudoin, 1998; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Campbell, 2010; Campbell, 2013). They have analysed the various religious messages within film, fiction, adverts, gaming and clothing for example and explored how this phenomenon affects epistemologies of religion consequently changing the social expressions and ontologies of faith (Wagner, 2012). Furthermore, popular culture has had some influence over identity narratives because it is embedded in everyday experiences from early childhood (Arthur, 2005). The meta-narratives within digital media affect identity construction because individuals play with and perform mediatised stories of self and belief (Marsh, 2005: 29). As Wagner (2012: 102) argues

"Today, religious identity is both reflected in and shaped by the technology we use, infused with the complex identity negotiations that involve our interaction with a host of new media components including apps, and the mediated worlds into which these apps invite us. Increasingly, we navigate through numerous digital spaces that evoke different aspects of who we are."

My interdisciplinary study therefore sits within the fields of sociology of religion, mediatisation of religion, identity studies and Pagan studies. It contributes by offering observations on how people construct faith identities through repeated performance of self within digital social networking spaces. Social media research has acknowledged that identities are explored and co-constructed within online spaces (Gal, Shifman and Kampf, 2015; Greenough, 2018) and people's identities are fluid (Filiciak, 2003). People have used social platforms to create personas they wish to be rather than who they are, to connect with others who they feel are similar to themselves (Massey, 2005). This makes them feel less isolated and offers opportunities for individuals to express their authentic self. My thesis enhances identity research because it offers an additional theoretical lens to analyse the social connections that assist identities and, argues that identity becomings are actualised through self-initiated interactions that happen within social networking spaces.

8.1 Threaded Themes within this Thesis

This study has explored themes that have been threaded throughout this thesis namely:

- Authentic self
- Polyphonic bricolage of self
- Rhizome-Mycelium networking
- Performance of Witch
- Communities of practice
- Online authority

Each theme has offered explanation to how a person becomes a witch and what Witch means to them. This thesis has discovered that to become a witch, gender is

not significant. Also, that a witch identity is fluid, personal and self-created. There is a plethora of witch identities and so it is difficult to define what a witch is. It is more useful therefore to explore multiplicities of Witch rather than a monolithic witch identity.

8.2 How to Become a Witch

A person decides to find out about witches because of a personal interest that may have been ignited through popular culture, experiences with the occult or because they felt different to the religious and cultural norm of their society. They engage in self and group study to find out as much as possible about the praxis of Witchcraft. Over time they come to a personal understanding and interpretation of what Witchcraft means to them and critique the hegemonic discourse of Witch including the term itself.

Their study is fuelled by intrinsic motivation and personal interest with regards to a broad range of witch related ideas. For example, heritage, ritual, objects, occult practices, ideologies, spell casting, sex, gender, feminism, spirituality. The interest is navigated through self-chosen clicks that are embedded in platforms; through conversations with others in chat rooms and within instant messenger boards and observation of embedded media within video messaging platforms. They also use the social media platforms to collate ideas images and hyperlinks that resonate with them into personalised picture boards.

Witches use Rhizome-Mycelium networking to ‘consume’ Witch identities that are performed and presented online in order to ‘produce’ the witch that they want to be

(Harvey, 2016: 138). Consequently, a particular witch's identity when shared on social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram can at times develop into a brand of celebrity-witch that potentially enables the production of a new form of Witch.

The formation of a witch is unique to each individual and is a blend of ideas and experiences. The online experiences build into a bricolage of the witch a person wants to be i.e. their ideal self. Over time their self is confirmed by others through likes and posts and through discovering witches who think and act like them hence they feel they become more authentic to their inner nature. Becoming a witch has enabled the individual to find an identity that reflects who they feel they are hence the journey of becoming Witch has offered them a sense of belonging and actualised their self-concept.

8.3 Future Themes to Explore

The summary of chapter seven acknowledged that some themes, raised within the body of the thesis, were not fully explored because to do so would detract from the three research aims and focus of the study. However, they are likely to be explored as future research projects.

Yet there are also supplementary themes that are related to the focus of this thesis but were not explicitly raised within the Life History Narrative interviews. The themes were identified when engaging in the literature trawl and online data analysis. The particular themes were related to the idea of

- A celebrity-witch – exploration of a networked spirituality and faith in comparison to community spirituality
- Witch as a parareligion (socially constructed and mediated)
- Social media platforms as influencers of Witch rather than people
- Witch authority in a liquid modern world and how that may change Paganism
- Online sacred spaces for witches and the online social sacred
- Sex and sexualities with regards to ideas of Witch spirituality, gender, feminism, sexual ethics
- Mediatised image of Witch through the decades
- Whether Rhizome-Mycelium Theory can be transferred to other faith traditions and used as a critical model for analysis of how faith identities are formed

Identifying such themes indicate that there is further scope for research in the area of contemporary Witchcraft that will add to the fields of religion, culture and media and will build upon the findings of this thesis.

8.4 Final Thoughts

This thesis has impacted on me personally. The journey of study, reflection, discussion, dialogue, Guesthood and self-analysis has encouraged me to become Academic, become Doctor of Philosophy and become Witch. I have engaged in rhizomatic behaviours that have directed me to think "like a witch's flight" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 41; O'Sulivan, 2016) and discover ideas, theories and opinions that have affected my sense of self and the construction of this thesis. I have found that I am a plateau in a rhizome, and at times a mycelium-witch because I am finding that now I am sharing what I know and understand with others. People come to me and ask questions as if I am an expert (although I do not feel I am) and I engage in open dialogue so that they can assemble their own understandings of Witch self.

My research has changed me and changed the research rhizome. Through being part of Guesthood (Harvey, 2003: 138) and engaging in dialogue with the many witches who have participated in this study, I have found that becoming Witch occurs mainly through the happenstance of engaging in the exchange of ideas with others. No becoming is the same and no witch is either.

I intend to continue with this area of study hence I find that this thesis is not the end of my academic journey but, like a rhizome, is in the middle. It "is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 27). I hope in future to nomadically follow ideas and create assemblages of multiple Witch theories to create new knowledge that will add to the fields of Sociology and the Mediatisation of Religion and Witchcraft.

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Appendix one: Life History Narrative Participant information

All interviews are digitally recorded, encrypted and stored securely.

PSEUDONYM	Age	Name that the participant used	INFORMATION	Location of interview (as chosen by interviewee)	Length of Interview	Date of interview
KELLY	Early 20s	WITCH	Trainee teacher in the final year of degree White English Practicing The Craft around 4 years	Kelly's home Pilot – joint interview	58:00	10.04.16
GRACE	Late 20s	SOLITARY WITCH	Trainee nurse in the final year of degree White English	Kelly's home Pilot –joint interview	58:00	10.04.16

			Practicing The Craft around 4 years			
MIKE	Late 20s	DRUID WITCH	Works outdoors has a degree White English Practicing The Craft for around 15 years A high priest and Bard	Interviewer's home	100:52	21.04.16
ELLIE	Mid 20s	BUDDHIST WITCH	Works in retail – has a degree White English Practicing The Craft for 5 years	Café	32:15	16.05.16
SIENNA	Mid 40s	GREEN WITCH (unsure of	Works in university as a lecturer	Sienna's home	41:11	27.05.16

		term Witch)	Has a Masters degree White English Practicing The Craft over 10 years			
SALLY	Early 40s	SPIRITUAL WITCH (unsure of term witch)	Works in administration in university White Welsh Practicing The Craft for 15 years	Sally's home	12:27 & 13:44	18.09.16
HOLLY	20	DIANIC WICCAN (has used the term Witch but does not practice Magic as much anymore so	Full time student White English Practicing The Craft around 5 years	University campus	34:24	27.02.17

		uses a branch of Wicca instead but does like the term Witch)				
PENNY	Mid 60s	WHITE WITCH	Retired School educated White English Practicing The Craft over 30 years	Local public house	55:35	02.03.17
LEXIE	Late 30s	SPIRITUAL (unsure of term Witch but does use the term Pagan)	Full time Post Graduate student White American Been practicing The Craft over 6 years	University campus	42:43	03.03.17
JENNY	Early 30s	WICCAN WITCH	Works in library service Has an Undergraduate	Jenny's home	40:08	10.04.17

			degree White English Practicing The Craft for over around 20 years A Wiccan High Priestess			
FELICITY	Early 50s	NATURE WITCH	Works in a school as a teaching assistant Has a PhD White English Practicing The Craft for around 30 years	In a field	42:58	04.05.17
DAVID	Late 60s	WITCH	Retired School educated	David's home	58:00	18.06.17

			White English Practicing The Craft for over 50 years High Priest			
TANYA	Early 50s	WITCH	Works in public sector Has a Masters degree White English Practicing The Craft over 30 years A high Priestess	Interviewer's home	100:00:26	09.06.17

Appendix two: List of URLs for online data

Appendix two: Chapter four images and URLs

Image No.	
1	Screenshot of Google search using parameter 'witch'
2	Screenshot of Google search using parameters 'witch identities'
3	Pinterest screenshot of search using parameters 'witch identities'
4	Screenshot of YouTube search using parameters 'witch'
5	Screenshot of Google search using search parameters 'witch', 'identities', 'spells'
6	@TheSmartWitch. No date. *No title* [Facebook] Available from https://www.facebook.com/ElizabethTheSmartWitch/ [Accessed 29.02.20] Image shows an illustration/painting of a woman in a long red dress looking at a crystal ball
7	Goddess Born. [August 2018] *No Title.* [Facebook] 10th October 2018. Available from https://www.facebook.com/GoddessBorn/ [Accessed 15.10.18] Image showing Willow from the series Buffy the Vampire Slayer with a meme that says be the gay Jewish witch you wish to see in the world
8	Hannah Beery [no date] *The Kitchen Witch* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327485722855/ [Accessed 10.10.18] Pinterest image 8 Pinterest illustration with labels on the central witch that explains how she can be identified as a kitchen witch.
9	@earth_witch [no date] *Earth Witch* [Twitter] no date. https://twitter.com/earth_witch [Accessed 10.10.18] Twitter image depicting the handle *earth-witch*
10	@TheEnglishWitch [no date] *The Pendle Witch* [Twitter] no date. Available from https://twitter.com/TheEnglishWitch [Accessed 09.10.18] Twitter image depicting the handle *The Pendle Witch*
11	Vi La Bianca [2018] *7 Questions for a Queer Atheist Witch*. [Blog

	online] 5th February 2018. Available from https://medium.com/@Vi_LaBianca/7-questions-for-a-queer-atheist-witch-7f79e878d00. [Accessed 17.10.18]
12	Vi La Bianca [2018] *7 Questions for a Queer Atheist Witch.* [Blog online] 5th February 2018. Available from https://medium.com/@Vi_LaBianca/7-questions-for-a-queer-atheist-witch-7f79e878d00 [Accessed 17.10.18]
13	@skylee_sullivan [no date] Skye. [Twitter] no date. Available at https://twitter.com/skylee_sullivan [Accessed 18.10.19] Twitter screenshot of *Skye* who is a self-identified witch and notes her Witch identity is a combination of Cherokee, Scots-Irish, Norse and Heathen
14	@Wicca_BluMoon [no date] *Wicca-BluMoon.* [Twitter] Available from https://twitter.com/Wicca_BluMoon [Accessed 18.10.18] Twitter screenshot *BluMoon* who self identifies as Wiccan, Spiritual and Humanist
15	@maggiewebster [2018] *Amazing photos of my mum, my daughter and me – 3 generations of strong women – maiden, mother and crone*. 22nd July 2018. Available from https://twitter.com/maggiewebster/media [Accessed 01.02.19] Screenshot of a photograph on my Twitter account with the handle The Digital Witchdoctor
16	@WnP_Official [no date] *Witches and Pagans* [Twitter] no date. Available from https://twitter.com/WnP_Official [Accessed 15.10.18] Screenshot of Twitter handle for *Witches&Pagans*
17	Screenshot of a list of Pagan Facebook groups
17a	Author's own image: Second Life photograph. Screenshot image of an avatar who has wings and is flying. Image given with permission from the owner of the avatar. No url available.
17b	Author's own image: Second Life photograph. Screenshot image of an avatar who was a robot. Image given with permission from the owner of the avatar. No url available
17c	Author's own image: Second Life photograph. Screenshot image of the avatar named Foxglove Inkpen. Image given with permission from the owner of the avatar. No url available.
17d	Author's own image: Second Life photograph. Screenshot image of the

	avatar named Irene Inkpen. Image given with permission from the owner of the avatar. No url available.
17e	Author's own image: Second Life photograph. Screenshot image of the avatar named Foxglove Inkpen and Irene Inkpen. Image given with permission from the person who owns both avatars. No url available.
18	Thewitchoftheforest [2018] *Say to Witches* [Instagram] 28th September 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BoQ9lGslBoq/ [Accessed 01.07.19] Instagram screenshot from the witchoftheforest of a blog depicting negative questions addressed at the witch who posted the blog
19	Witchcraft Alchemy [2014] *Granddaughters* [YouTube] 16th November 2014. Available from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alNwmTFZri0 [Accessed 18.11.18] Screenshot of the YouTube video that uses the meme 'we are the granddaughters you couldn't burn'
20	@sisitersofthemist [no date] *Sisters of the Mist Priestess of Avalon* [Facebook] no date. Available from https://www.facebook.com/sistersofthemists/ [Accessed 01.07.19] Facebook image of *Sisters of the mist* that explores being authentic to one's personal path
21	The Solitary Walking Witch [no date] *In Witchcraft each of us must reveal our personal truth* [Pinterest] no date. Available at https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/496029346439615124/ [Accessed 01.07.19] Pinterest image with a meme that suggests Witchcraft is a personal truth
22	Mandi Woolwytch Neary on @WitchesLair [2017] *I need no special tools to do my craft …* [Facebook] 29th August 2017. Available at https://www.facebook.com/pg/WitchesLair/posts/?ref=page_internal [Accessed 01.07.19] Facebook image posted by Mandi Woolwych Neary stating that the only thing a witch needs for witchcraft is themselves
23	@sisitersofthemist [2019] *No-one Holds power over us …* [Facebook] 10th June 2019. Available at https://www.facebook.com/pg/WitchesLair/posts/?ref=page_internal (Accessed 15.10.18) Facebook image depicting comment that identifies how it is important to be firm with personal beliefs and be authentic

24	Rona Llanos [no date] *people sometimes ask…*[Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/ASjHPa2rY_5ECdBVseVHyms0fgUbF83HvNnY_6UDUZv9-U5WmZ6hudA/ (Accessed 18.11.19) Showing a woman in black with a statement that notes that being a witch is innate
25	F. Vicky Roberts in The Defiant Crone [2019] *Becoming a witch isn't…*[Facebook] 9th August 2019. Available from https://www.facebook.com/groups/283164045555203/permalink/354076015130672/ [Accessed 18.11.19] Facebook image of a meme that is related to image 26
26	Vicky Roberts in The Defiant Crone [2019] *Becoming a witch isn't…*[Facebook] 9th August 2019. https://www.facebook.com/groups/283164045555203/permalink/354076015130672/ [Accessed 18.11.19] Facebook image of comments following the post in image 25 that have a similar sentiment
27	Mary Crossley in Witches in the Hut [2018] *Witch whether you are natural born…* [Facebook] 10th July 2018 Available at https://www.facebook.com/groups/509126579256738/permalink/1027833637386027/ [Accessed 18.11.19]
28	Ken Herzog [no date] *Never forget you are magic*. [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/Ab3Rl3d3_Lb4TPbOs2m-XLYyDnrsoOgfvQtKmUmpJKYb4SNv4Fv4ji0/ [Accessed 18.11.19] Image with meme suggesting a person in innately magical
29	Gypsy Moon Enchanted Chronicles [no date] *The day I decided…* [Pinterest] no date. Available at https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/433541901612348570/ [Accessed 07.1.19] Pinterest image saved by *Christa Reeves* suggesting magic is everywhere
30	Lulu Belle [no date] *Witchcraft is not a way…* [Pinterest] no date. Available at https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/302726406184067920/ [Accessed 18.11.18] Pinterest image stating Witchcraft is a lifestyle
31	Conchy Y Luna [2017] *I am not lost…* [Pinterest] 17th April 2017.

	Available from https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/331366485081004260/ [Accessed 18.11.18] Pinterest image suggesting that becoming a witch makes a person enlightened
32	peachycinnamon [2018] *no title* [Instagram] 15th March 2018. Available at https://www.instagram.com/p/BgXA2PKFa68/ [Accessed 05.02.19] Instagram post from Wiccan witch *Harmony Nice* that includes high order Witch metaphors. The image shows her kneeling with a book of shadows and candles
33	peachycinnamon [2017] *no title* [Instagram] 5th December 2017. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BdYEcKGg3zB/ [Accessed 05.02.19] Instagram post from Wiccan witch *Harmony Nice* that includes a pentangle and book
34	peachycinnamon [2015] no title [Instagram] 5th March 2015. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/Bf9MyLaA-Gt/ [Accessed 05.02.19] Instagram post from Wiccan witch *Harmony Nice* that includes her sitting by a stream
35	Colorado Witch [no date] *Solitary but not alone* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/516436282268902409/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Example of solitary witchcraft saved by *Colorado Witch* with a woman standing in a circle of candles
36	The Witchcraft Chronicles [no date] *The Solitary Witch* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/439734351098596849/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Pinterest image of a solitary witch
37	Tinthia Clemant [no date] *Solitary Means Alone* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/382594930840187194/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Pinterest image of a woman by a pool and that statement explains what solitary Witchcraft is
38	David Andrew Brujeria [no date] *no title* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/416371928022763402/ [Accessed

	Image showing group ritual outdoors whilst naked saved by *Cluttered Gypsy* and *David Andrew*
39	Christia Jakobsen @SokeAnshu [2020] *it's a beautiful and delightful sight …* [Twitter] 9th Feb 2020. Available from https://twitter.com/SokeAnshu/status/1226351820605468677 [Accessed 02.02.20] Image and post suggest skycladding as a common practice
40	Christia Jakobson [2019] *no title* [Twitter] 16th May 2019. Available from https://twitter.com/SokeAnshu/status/1129073174971396096 [Accessed 20.2.20] Depicts a naked witch conducting ritual outdoors
41	peachycinnamon [2015] *no title* [Instagram] 5th March 2015. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/Bf9MyLaA-Gt/ [Accessed 05.02.19] Instagram of Wiccan witch *Harmony Nice* meditating outdoors
42	Pagan Goddess [2018] *I feel the heartbeat of the earth* [Facebook] 2nd March 2018. Available from https://www.facebook.com/pg/pagangoddessespage/photos/?ref=page_internal [Accessed 17.08.19] Image of a naked woman amongst a spiral of stones that illustrate skycladding
43	Carol Hiscock [2019] *@wildseawitch customised God and Goddess*. [Twitter] no date. Available from https://twitter.com/search?q=wildseawitch&src=typd [Accessed 08.07.19] Etsy image is hyperlinked from the twitter post. Available from https://t.co/rSrRsYZPJu [08.07.19] Merchandise related to nature symbols and the goddess
44	Christian Linwood [2015] *@priceofsilveoz* [Twitter] 26th November 2015. Available from https://twitter.com/search?f=images&vertical=default&q=wildseawitch&src=typd [Accessed 08.07.19] Merchandise that depict the god and goddess
45	*Liam Shand* [2019] *@liam_HPG Beltane blessings* [Twitter] 20th April 2019. Available from https://twitter.com/liam_hpg/status/1123471676765814785?s=12 [Accessed 08.07.19] Twitter post about the god and goddess at Beltane

46	David Smith [date] *no title* [Tumblr] no date. Available from https://merrymeet.tumblr.com/ (Accessed 08.07.19) Pagan believes God to be both male and female and is hyperlinked to image 47
47	Merrymeet [no date] *Mother Goddess, Father God…* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/560979697322878340/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Pagan believes God to be both male and female and is hyperlinked to image 46
48	Alan Sen [no date] *The Lord and Lady…* [Pinterest] no date. Available at https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/491173903083918972/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Pinterest image of the Lord and Lady/God and Goddess for Beltane also saved by *faeriewood.com*
49	Amanda Boyd [no date] *Divine Feminine* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/534591418248708339/ [accessed 08.07.19] Screenshot image of mother earth goddess Gaia
50	Angela Blessing [no date] *Gaia. Mother Earth and the Environment.* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/66428163233597242/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Explores how the feminine Goddess is within nature and is mother earth and Gaia
51	Ignota Books [2019] *Witches for reproductive justice* [Twitter] 17th May 2019. Available from https://twitter.com/IgnotaBooks/status/1129349796710379526 [Accessed 08.07.19]
52	Kate Schatz [2018] *We are coming for you* [Twitter] 21st January 2018. Available from https://twitter.com/kateschatz/status/954920192710139905 [Accessed 08.07.19] Using the Witch signifier of a hat and also relating to the W.I.T.C.H protest movement. The hashtag #witchesagainsttrunp is used
53	The Hidden Witch [2018] *Time does not confine the Crone* [Facebook]

	5th November 2018. Available from https://www.facebook.com/inthebroomcloset/photos/a.688175908003938/1160156704139187/?type=3&theater [Accessed 08.07.19] Facebook image of a crone posted by *The Hidden Witch* with statement that notes she is someone who dances with nature and is powerful
54	The Hidden Witch [2018] *This time belongs to the Crone* [Facebook] 4th October 2018. Available from https://www.facebook.com/inthebroomcloset/photos/a.688175908003938/1141970752624449/?type=3&theater [Accessed 08.07.19] Facebook image of an older woman who is considered a crone. Statement overlaid on the image suggests she is wise, creative and blooming. Posted by *The Hidden Witch*
55	karen unrure [no date] *With age comes inner strength* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327489116881/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Image of a strong older woman with a statement of how she has the power and does not care what others think
56	tracyjcalpai [2018] *During ancient times…* [Instagram] 1st October 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BoZYJ3Vng3V/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Shows an older woman and the statement notes how ancient women have lost their value due to Patriarchy
57	Wolfmaan [no date] *A male witch is called a witch.* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327486927777/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Image of sexualised male witch with tattoos, a cat and cloak. The statement overlayered in the image notes he is a witch and dismisses other terms occasionally associated with male witches
58	Redbubble [no date] *no title* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327486927813/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Male witch on a broom
59	Justpaganstuff [no date] justpaganstuff.tumblr.com. *You have witchcraft on your lips.* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327486927849/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Pinterest image of a naked male witch on a broom with a meme that says

	not all witches are female
60	Andra Couto [no date] *Witch is a gender neutral term* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327486927831/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Pinterest image depicting meme that says Witch as a gender-neutral term
61	theboipoet.wordpress.com [no date] *A witch is a witch …* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/76209418673336587/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Pinterest image depicting Witch as a gender neutral term
62	Lucretia Ward [no date] *not all witches are skinny bitches* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327486927830/[Accessed 04.07.19] Image of voluptuous sexualised maiden witch on a broomstick
63	Deanna Payne [no date] *items similar to Mariella fat…* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/736127501576654377/ [Accessed 04.07.19] Pinterest image of voluptuous sexualised maiden witch on a broomstick
64	Katie Jones [no date] *Witch...ok, this looks too much like a self portrait...time for a diet.* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/241294492511062468/ [Accessed 04.07.19] Pinterest image of voluptuous maiden witch on a broomstick with a cat
65	wytchcrafttas [2018] *cuddly cooks* [Instagram] 27th October 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BpbWTdwAURl/ [Accessed 04.07.19] Instagram image of two maiden witches around a cauldron and who are voluptuous and sexualised Ray.Nor [2018] *Another old favourite of mine* [Instagram] 26th October 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BpYriC-Arbm/ [Accessed 04.07.19]
66	*Edith Horn* [no date] *Magick is neither black nor white…* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327486927793/ [Accessed

	08.07.19] Pinterest image showing meme that notes the binaries of Witchcraft
67	Rukwago Ronald [no date] *Lessons learned. Light and dark.* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/840484349184854776/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Pinterest image both shows that magic is not evil or good but a balance of both
68	*garden_of_midnight* [2018] *no title* [Instagram] 15th December 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BrZso5lHiOs/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Instagram image showing a witch and the devil dancing
69	garden_of_midnight [2018] *gif no title* [Instagram] 21st May 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BjDpcZIgSkk/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Instagram GIF of Ouija board using #occult
70	garden_of_midnight [2018] *#witchy #witches…* [Instagram] 11th May 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BipauQyAErE/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Instagram image of Pagan horned god in the woods using the #occult
71	C.Pennyfeather [2018] *The veil grows thin Lost in the trees I wander Seeking my ancestors past. There just over the loam I hear them calling to take my hand.* [Twitter] 30th October 2018. Available from https://twitter.com/PennyfeatherC/status/1057419368999632898 [Accessed 08.07.19] Poem about spirits of ancestors
72	Wolfman [no date] *A male witch is called a witch.* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327486927777/ [Accessed 08.07.19] A young sexualised witch flying on a broomstick
73	Marina Voland [no date] *In the darkness her allure grows.* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327485570775/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Image of a semi-naked goddess Lilith

Appendix two: Chapter five images and URLs

Image No.	
1	Tara Deuschmann [no date] *Nubiamancy…* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/448811919113008747/ [Accessed 28.11.18] Pinterest image of a non-white witch levitating and reading a book
2	thehoodwitch [2018] *no title* [Instagram] 27th June 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/Bkgl4AMhlHz/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link [Accessed 28.11.18] Instagram image of a non-white witch with smoke around her
3	Kai Erebus [no date] *I'm getting a Sabrina: The Teenage Witch vibe from her!* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/864128247229673482/ [Accessed 28.11.18] Pinterest image of a white young witch who is wearing gothic-style clothes and holding a smouldering stick of sage
4	Jen Bartel [no date] *no title* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/218213544423041913/ [Accessed 28.11.8] Pinterest image of three teenage/young witches sitting together with candles and a ouija board.
5	Witchipedia. 2018. *After lighting sage in my roommate has negative energy.* [Website] no date. Available from http://www.witchipedia.com/faq:after-lighting-sage-my-roommate-has-negative-energy-and [Accessed 28.11.8] Witchipedia screenshot that shows front page of the platform
6	Witchipedia. 2018. *After lighting sage in my roommate has negative energy.* [Website] no date. Available from http://www.witchipedia.com/faq:after-lighting-sage-my-roommate-has-negative-energy-and [Accessed 28.11.8] Witchipedia screenshot that show examples of question and answer discussions about topics of interest related to The Craft or Paganism in general.

7	Brenda G [no date] *no title* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/449585975299766151/ [Accessed 28.11.18] Pinterest image that include symbols of cat, magic, moon, books, candles, a 'brew' and self-study with a girl meditating on a stool. Books are floating around her.
8	Ladybue 75 [no date] *No title* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/343118065359262961/ [Accessed 28.11.18] Pinterest image that include symbols of cat, owl, moon, hat, books, candle, a 'brew' and self-study with a witch reading by an open window.
9	Martha Masters [no date] *No title* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/640285271996323575/ [Accessed 28.11.18] Pinterest image that includes symbols of cat, crow, cauldron, hat, candle, pumpkin, book , a 'brew' and self-study. The young witch is reading by a cauldron and has a crow and cat nearby.
10	Doberlady [no date] *No title* [Pinterest] no date., Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/412783122081718780/ [Accessed 328.11.18] Pinterest image of a mature witch with symbols of cat, triple moon, moon, candle, owl, magical objects e.g. athame, spider, a 'brew' and self-study. She is writing with a quill. Saved by *dobberlady.deviantart.com*
11	Keith Parkinson [no date] no title [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327487362161/ [Accessed 28.11.18] Pinterest image of a male witch reading and looking up as if in thought. He is seated by a stained-glass window. The image includes symbols of tarot, magic, myth, books, symbols of divination and magic, a 'brew' and self-study window
12	The Hidden Witch [2017] *To the witches that weren't born …* [Facebook] 13th February 2017. Available from https://www.facebook.com/inthebroomcloset [Accessed 28.11.18] Post demonstrates a community of practice
13	witchesthorn [2018] *No title* [Instagram] no date. Available from https://www.instagram.com/witchesthorn/ [Accessed 28.11.18]

	Instagram screenshot of a board within the platform from *The Witches Thorn*. Each image is a rhizome that offers a different perspective of Witch and offers hyperlinks to other ideas and pathways.
14	Yogainternational.com [no date] *Moon Salutation* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/248894316887926096/ [Accessed 28.11.18] Pinterest Image of the Moon Salutation and the various positions as demonstrated by an illustration of a hare. From some the hare is a believed to be a symbol /totem of the witch
15	Patheospagan [2018] *The more I think about it …* [Twitter hyperlink in Blog] 26th November 2018. Available from https://www.patheos.com/blogs/tempest/2018/11/healing-ourselves-while-aiding-guiding-new-witches.html?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=FBCP-PAG&utm_content=tempest [Accessed 28.11.18] Twitter Image that links to a Pagan Blog from *A Modern Traditional Witch*
16	The Pagan Federation [2018] *Samhain festival* [Facebook] 9th November 2018. Available from https://www.facebook.com/paganfederation/photos/a.992122594147914/2443288329031326/?type=3&theater [16.06.19] Facebook image of an advert for a Samhain festival
17	Witchschool [2018] *Spirit Work* [Twitter] 25th March 2018. Available from https://twitter.com/search?q=witchschool&src=typd [Accessed 30.11.18] Twitter image advertising Witch workshops at *Witchschool*
18	Hedgewitchery [no date] *Hedgewitchery Diploma Course* [Blog] no date. Available from https://www.centreofexcellence.com/shop/hedgewitchery-diploma-course/?fbclid=IwAR0PGSwukocjnl16Yyks5jOksKK_65pRHS1cDeJ2tdjSGURQyder-QSI_x0 [Accessed 30.11.18] Image advertising a course in *Hedgewitchery*
19	Guardianofthegoddess [2018] *no title* [Instagram] 1st December 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/Bq20j3aHtq9/ [Accessed 02.12.18] Image and post demonstrating authenticity due to sharing personal information and popularity from *avalon.calling*

20	LavenderMoon [2017] *The Earth does not belong to you* [Facebook] 25th October 2017. Available from https://www.facebook.com/LavenderMoon42/photos/a.172995585731 8532/1879136632400453/?type=3&theater [Accessed 02.12.18] Facebook screenshot image from *Lavender Moon* of the Green Man with 503 shares and 753 likes
21	Sistersofthemist [2018] *it takes a lot more courage…* [Facebook] 30th November 2018. Available from https://www.facebook.co/sistersofthemists/photos/a.496255387144734 /1546532808783648/?type=3&theater [Accessed 02.12.18] Facebook image of a meme about courage from *sistersofthemist* 72 likes and 31 shares
22	wake_the_witches [2017] *women are the bloody temple* [Instagram] 16th October 2017. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BaTVWgSAsMT/ [Accessed 02.12.18] Image of witch *Lisa Lister* who names herself as the Sassy She. 331 likes and comments that affirm her online status as having Witch authority or at least authenticity that resonates with the online community who follow her.
23	Sassylisalister [2018] *Sophia, Eve, Kora …* [Instagram] 23rd October 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BpRNtV9l6lP/ [Accessed 02.12.18] Image of the inside of an apple from *Lisa Lister* with comments about the magic of the apple and its link to the goddess.
24	Sassylisalister [2018] *Sophia, Eve, Kora …* [Twitter] 23rd October 2018. Available from https://twitter.com/lisaclark/status/1054658367577341953 [Accessed 02.12.18] Twitter image from *Lisa Lister* that includes a photograph of the inside of an apple (similar to Instagram post identified in image 23)
25	Sharon Smith [2018] *Any of you direct descendants of Salem witches?* [Facebook] 28th August 2018. Available from https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=sahron%20smith%20defiant %20crone&epa=SEARCH_BOX [Accessed 04.12.18] Facebook screenshot asking about being a descendent from the Salem witches
26	The Doreen Valiente Foundation [2019] *No title* [Facebook] no date.

	Available from https://www.facebook.com/DoreenValienteFoundation/ [Accessed 03.12.18] Image is the Facebook home page for the foundation
27	autumn_phoenix1[2018] *Abstinence …* [Instagram] 2nd Decmber 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/Bq3vnwsnBlO/ [Accessed 04.12.18] Instagram image that states Christian theology is myth. Shows the Virgin Mary with the sacred heart of Jesus in her chest and comments.
28	Derek Stokes [2013] shared from David Rockechild *no title.* [Facebook] 1st December 2013. Available from https://www.facebook.com/derek.stokes.71/posts/10157032024583413 [Accessed 01.12.18] Facebook image with an anti-Christian message. Contains a nun and boy with a book
29	autumn_pheonix1 [2018] *Good Morning…* [Instagram] 2nd December 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/Bq5MmAIHu1-/ [Accessed 04.12.18] Instagram image that contains an anti-Christian message and satires evangelican Christians
30	Primitive Witchery. [2018] *ME: I promise…* [Facebook] 2nd December 2018. Available from https://www.facebook.com/primitivewitchery/photos/a.121852881816 4831/2563563833661316/?type=3&theater [Accessed 04.12.18] Facebook image 30 depicting the Pagan god and a meme that suggests Christmas was previously a Pagan festival. Posted by *Primitive Witchery.* There are 288 shares of this post and it is also on other social media such as Twitter and Pinterest
31	Amethyst Shakti [no date] *Yes, I am a Witch …* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/837599230674693951/ [Accessed 04.12.18] Pinterest image that demonstrates a witch is othering themselves to enable discussions. It has a statement that starts Yes, I am a Witch. Saved by *Taylor Strong*
32	Julia Bell [no date] *we are the granddaughters…* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327487103772/ [Accessed 04.12.18] Pinterest photograph that demonstrates how witches other themselves

	by outwardly demonstrating against misogyny and reclaiming Witch heritage and legitimacy. This image has also been repeated on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. The photo is of a woman holding up a placard saying ‘We are the granddaughters of the witches you couldn't burn’
33	MoonKat [no date] *The witch…* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327486428877/ [Accessed 04.12.18] Image showing a person in black reaching out with their hand and stating ‘If we appeal to you …’

Appendix two: Chapter six images and URLs

Image No.	
1	Sarah Hartwell [No date] *Where there's a witch there's a way.* [Pinterest] No date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/307300374547078928/ [Accessed 23.01.19] Pinterest image that is linked to the cult TV programme *Bewitched*. Shows the character Samantha with her hand in the air.
2	Krista [no date] *We are the weirdos mister* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/60446819977678458/ [Accessed from 23.02.19] Pinterest image with a quotation taken from the cult 90s film *The Craft*
3	4wands [no date] *When I am old…* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/844493650241289/ [Accessed 21.02.19] Image is a screenshot from the 90s film *Practical Magic* with a link to a blog called the 4 of Wands, which is a reference to a tarot card and a poem.
4	Witchy-Tips [no date] *True Magic is neither …* [Pinterest] No date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/823314375606611637/ [Accessed 21.02.19] Pinterest image that is a quote from the film *The Craft* about true magic.
5a and 5b	Proud Lion comics [2019] *Archie forever…* [Twitter] 15th February 2019. Available from https://twitter.com/proudlioncomics/status/1096383628425265153 Twitter image with a hyperlink to @proudlioncomics that shows new edition of comics about the New Adventures of Sabrina the teenage witch. 5b includes a photograph of main character (Sabrina) and candles.
6	#sabrinawitch [no date] *no title* [Instagram] no date. https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/sabrinawitch/?hl=en [Accessed 15.01.19] Instagram image of Sabrina with hashtag linked to the Netflix programme the *New Adventures of Sabrina* and TV programme *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*. Image is a screen shot with the results from a hashtag
7	#witch [no date] *no title* [Instagram] no date. Available from

	https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/witch/ [Accessed 15.12.19] Image shows results from an Instagram search using #witch that show some signifiers such as Tarot decks, crystals, gothic makeup, cauldron and links to some popular culture
8	#witch [no date] *no title* [Instagram] no date. Available from https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/witch/ [Accessed 22.02.19] Results from an Instagram search using #witch that show some signifiers such as Tarot decks, crystals, gothic makeup, cauldron and links to some popular culture
9	#gothicwitch [no date] *no title* [Instagram] no date. Available from https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/gothicwitch/ [Accessed 22.02.19] Instagram screenshot that show results using the hashtag #gothicwitch
10	#gothicwitch [no date] *no title* [Instagram] no date. Available from https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/gothicwitch/ [Accessed 22.02.19]
11	Braulio Berdecia [no date] *Urban Witch* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327487561736/ (Accessed 16.17.19) Pinterest screenshot titled the 'Urban witch'. It represents a Gothic witch and shows a woman sitting on the floor wearing black. She has tattoos and is holding a smouldering smudge stick and reading a book of shadows.
12	Peachycinamon [2018] *No title*. [Instagram] 15th March 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BgXA2PKFa68/ [Accessed 17.7.19] Image showing an elevated book of shadows and magic. The witch is kneeling by some candles and books
13	memesandmagik [2019] *Me, a baby witch…* [Instagram] 29th January 2019. Available https://www.instagram.com/p/BtOYXgJHUaL/ [Accessed 27.1.19] Instagram image that shows how a person learns Witchcraft through practice and mistakes
14	thewitchoftheforest [2019] *no title* [Instagram] 3rd July 2019. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BzdLZrEDb-l/ [Accessed 7.1.19] Instagram Image of a tarot spread with candles

15	*thewitchoftheforest* [2019] no tile [Instagram] 14th January 2019. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BsnyppPFt9L/ [Accessed 27.1.9] Instagram image that is of an altar and a cat
16	Facebook image that is a photo montage within the public *Facebook* page of *The Celtic Cottage Witch* [no date] Photos [Facebook] no date. Available from https://www.facebook.com/pg/celticcottagewitch/photos/?ref=page_internal [Accessed 11.02.19]
17	Harmony Nice [2017] *Rune stones, the basics and how to use them. Enchanted Endeavours Ep 4.* [YouTube v-log] 11th January 2017. Available from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGYgXmUEcCk [Accessed 31.01.19] Screenshot of the comments related to the YouTube channel
18	thepunkwitch255 [2016] *Love working on my book of shadows …* [Instagram] 21st August 2016. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BJWTC5yBVXY/ [Accessed 31.01.19] Instagram image showing a personalised Grimoire by *ThePunkWitch255*
19	Red-moon-witch [no date] Magickally Moonlit. [Pinterest] no dated. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/617837642601063374/ [Accessed 31.01.19] Image showing the Witch signifier of a personalised book of shadows
20	Sarah fawn Empey [no date] *Itty Bitty Celtic Witch* [YouTube channel] no date. Available from https://www.youtube.com/user/ittybittycelticwitch [Accessed 31.01.19] A witch who offers videos demonstrating her personalised approach to Witchcraft
21	The Enchanted One [2019] *The witch I was yesterday…* [Facebook] 15th January 2019. Available from [https://www.facebook.com/Enchanted42/photos/a.1466673010260699/2191818347746158/?type=3&theater Accessed 18.02.19 Facebook screenshot of a post by *Pagan Poppet* demonstrating the expectation that Witch identity will always evolve
22	Luci Ransome [2019] *Video of Elaine…* [Facebook video] 12th February 2010. Available from https://www.facebook.com/events/947249392142443/permalink/965686423632073/ [Accessed 18.02.19]

	Image that has a link to a video of a Wassailing ritual. The post demonstrates ritual through performance of music, clothing and song.
23	@hollycassel [2019] *90% of what I do…* [Twitter] 9th February 2019. Available form https://twitter.com/hollycassell/status/1094286573334605824 [Accessed 31.01.19] Twitter post that shows about how witches learn The Craft
24	Gardianofthegoddess [2018] *avalon.calling* [Facebook] 2nd Nobvember 2018. https://www.instagram.com/p/BpqZGx8HV36/ [Accessed 9.2.19] Shows photograph of woman dressed in black by a cauldron
25	Pagan Poppet [no date] *I call upon powers…* [Pinterest] no date. https://i.pinimg.com/originals/b7/e4/39/b7e4396934035656a6a34adee655bcc7.png (Accessed 17.07.19] Pinterest image shows a person holding a candle and a spell to banish unwanted things. It demonstrates Illocutionary Speech Act
26	The Kingdom of White Witch [no date] *To Increase one's beauty…* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://i.pinimg.com/originals/b7/e4/39/b7e4396934035656a6a34adee655bcc7.png [Accessed 21.09.19] Image that is a spell that increases one's beauty. The image is of a pale feminine face. It demonstrates Illocutionary Speech Act
27	The Silver Witch [no date] *Enemy Binding Spell* [Pinterest] No date. https://i.pinimg.com/originals/4d/bf/c6/4dbfc683334a835cd1fc9b1f05be6027.jpg [accessed 21.02.19] Pinterest photograph of a hand holding fire with an Enemy Binding spell on top. The fire within the palm. It demonstrates Perlocutionary Speech Act
28	Andrea Scrogham [no date] *By knot of one the spell has begun…* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://i.pinimg.com/originals/0f/29/10/0f291043eb3abe4743fc5c1853b67716.jpg [Accessed 21.02.19] Image of a woman dancing and a spell that is about knots. A Knot tying spell is an example of Perlocutionary Speech Act
29	Pagan Poppet [no date] *Remember magic spells take many forms…* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://i.pinimg.com/originals/d3/6f/ae/d36faeadebb4eacb8f29d34ee5f66

	0b9.jpg [Accessed 21.02.19] Pinterest image showing a girl looking at the camera and holding rosemary. The words within the text note that spell work is more than reciting a poem. The image demonstrates that ritual is associated with speech and intention. The words within the text note that spell work is more than reciting a poem
30	Kiaora girl [2018] *Joshua 24:15* [Instagram] 30th October 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/p/BpkqritFrfP/ [Accessed 15.02.19] Instagram image that shows how some groups have misunderstood the Pagan Sabbat Samhain. It includes a quotation from Joshua 24:15 and infers a sentiment that is anti-witches
31a	Mark brown [2019] *The gateway to hell? Hundreds of anti-witch marks found in Midlands cave* [Guardian Online] 15th February 2019. Available from https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/feb/15/nottinghamshire-cave-carvings-marks-scare-witches?CMP=share_btn_tw [Accessed 15.02.19] Web screenshot taken from *The Guardian* news website. It uses the stereotype of evil-witch and devil worship to discuss a cultural heritage site
31b	The Guardian news [2019] *The gateway to hell? Hundreds of anti-witch marks found in Midlands cave* [Twitter] 15th February 2019. Available from https://twitter.com/search?q=witch&src=typd [Accessed 15.02.19] Twitter image that uses the stereotype of evil-witch and devil worship to discuss a cultural heritage site
32	secretivewitch [2018] *We are not dangerous…* [Instagram] 10th November 2018. Available from https://www.instagram.com/secretivewitch/?hl=en [Accessed 15.02.19] Instagram image with a picture of Margot Adler and a quotation Adler

Appendix three: Chapter seven image and URLs

Image No.	
1	Diann Morrison [no date] *As above so below…* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/340092209353976084/ [Accessed 25.02.19] Image of the Pagan Tree of Life with a Pagan mantra – 'As above so below…'
2	Naturalmystichealings [no date] *No title* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327476722916/ [Accessed 17.07.19] Pinterest post showing the person as the centre of the tree. Also, the image contains spirals. Saved by *naturalmystichealings.webs.com*
3 and 3a	Buzzle.com [no date] *The Celtic Tree of life …* [Blog] no date. Available from https://spiritualray.com/celtic-tree-of-life-meaning [Accessed 17.07.19] Frreart.com [no date] *Explaining the Hidden meaning of the Celtic Tree of Life* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/745556913299376369/ [Accessed 17.07.19] Buzzle.com and *Buzzfeed* blog show the traditional image of the Celtic Tree of Life. It looks like a Celtic knot.
4	Model diagram of Rhizome-Mycelium Theory
5	Model diagram that represents the complex nature of becomings within social networking spaces
6	Traci Hedenberg-Schnepp [no date] T*he most dangerous animal in the world…* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327485530381/ [Accessed 17.07.19] Photograph of a witch laughing with a meme about danger
7	fbcdn-sphotos-b-a.akamaihd.net [no date] *no title* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327481018457/ [Accessed 14.04.19] Pinterest image of a hag witch imparting knowledge and being useful to the young. A hag is placing a pointed hat onto the head of a child as if she is being anointed with a crown. It has been widely shared within

	social media platforms.
8	karen unrue [no date] *With age comes inner strength...* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327489116881/ [Accessed 14.04.19] Pinterest image of a strong older woman with a statement of how she has the power and does not care what others think.
9	The Witchcraft Chronicles [no date] Stand Proud witches… [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/748723506779675391/ [Accessed 14.04.19] Pinterest image demonstrating image of the empowered sexualized female witch
10	Wolfmaan [no date] *A male witch is called a witch.* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/423127327486927777/ [Accessed 08.07.19] Image of sexualised male witch with tattoos, a cat and cloak. The statement overlayered in the image notes he is a witch and dismisses other terms occasionally associated with male witches
11	Google [no date] *search 'witch'* [Search engine] no date. Available from https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=witch&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwisk9O_gZnlAhUKTsAKHZYhDu4Q_AUIEigB&biw=1145&bih=898 [Accessed 13.10.19] Google screenshot of search engine results for the term witch
12 and 13	Harmony Nice [2017] *Different types of Wiccan? Wicca paths, enchanted Endeavours Ep18.* [YouTube V-log] 17th December 2017. Available from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DVYvphGb_k&t=74s [Accessed 13.10.19] Images 12 and 13 depict a screenshot from the V-log and comments attached to the YouTube post. The comments are not about Witchcraft but more about her make up clothes, image, vulnerability and authenticity.
14	Anastasia Catris [2018] *Will be catching up on #inkoctober...* [Twitter] Available from https://twitter.com/AnastasiaCatris/status/1057646361858990080 [Accessed 13.10.19]

	Image that shows the occult use of a ouija board and the link to the spirit world and ancestors.
15	Metalarchives.com [no date] *no title* [Pinterest] no date. Available from https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/429108670724650053/ [Accessed 13.10.19] Image showing Pan attacking naked female The image can also be found in https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Faethon/Summoning_the_Spirits_of_the_Past/261361
16	Metmuseum.org [no date] *no title* [Pinterest] no date. Available from Pinterest https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/446982331741430877/ [Accessed 13.10.19] Also posted by *metmuseum.org* and available from https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/90006242?pos=28&rpp=20&pg=2&rndkey=20121111&ft=*&when=A.D.+1400-1600&what=Drawings Image shows Pan running after a female

Appendix Three is an electronic PDF that displays all the images